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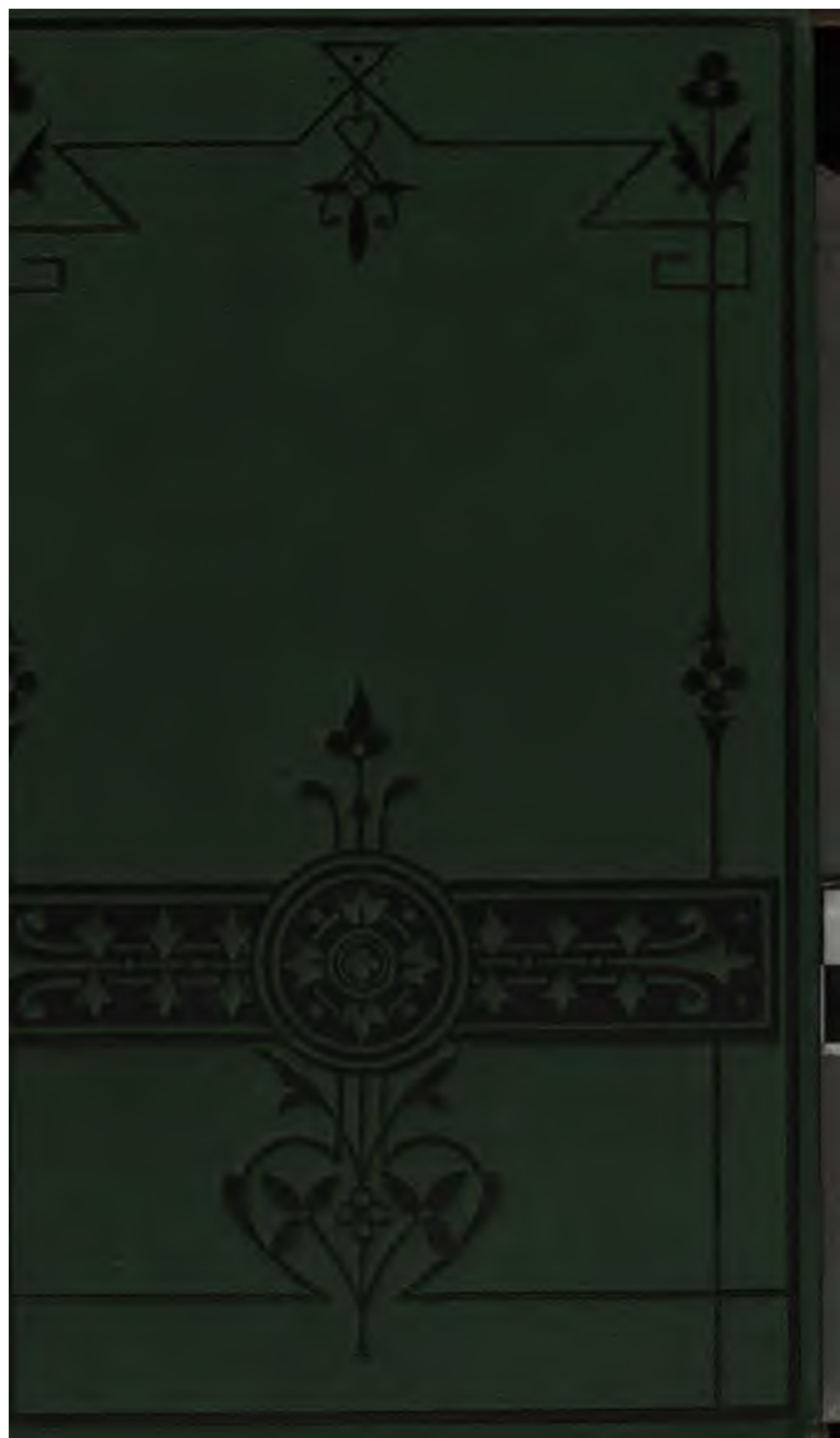
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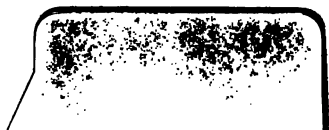
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RIBBLESDALE  
OR  
LANCASHIRE SIXTY YEARS AGO

BY  
SIR JAMES KAY-SHUTTLEWORTH, BART.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

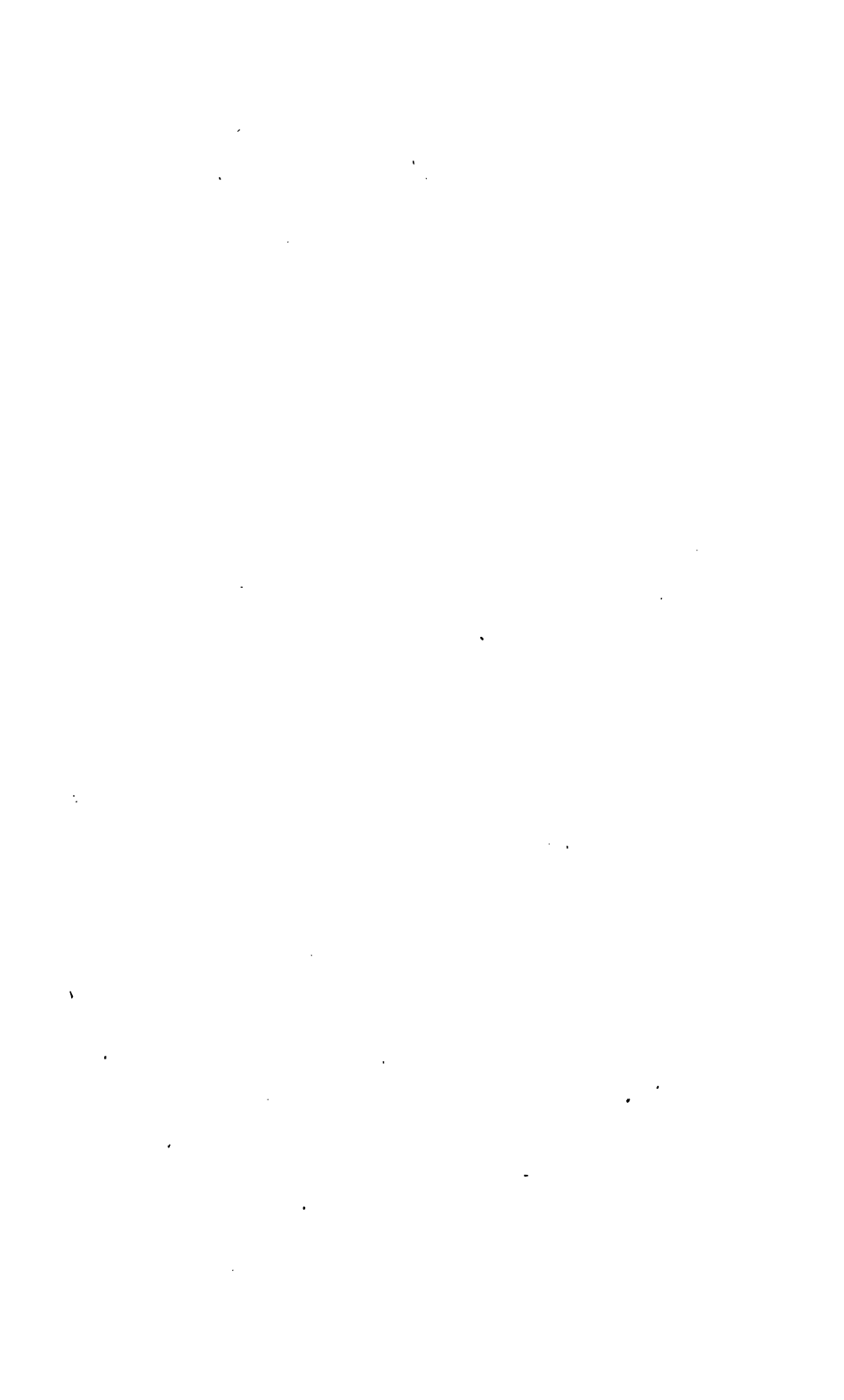


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1874

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## P R E F A C E.

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A FEW WORDS of introduction appear to the Author desirable in order to prevent misconception.

The scene of this story is chiefly that part of Ribblesdale which lies between Clitheroe and Ribchester, together with those portions of the valleys of the Hodder and Calder which extend a few miles on either side of the main stream to which they are tributaries. The names of places in this region are not changed, and the author has endeavoured to describe them with fidelity. But the reader would search in vain for two or three accessories, such as the Bendwood Cliff. He may find the beech wood, at Pendleton, on the flank of Pendle, but not the rock, the water-

fall, and the Owlets' Hole. No other important change has been made in the picture of Lancashire scenery.

On the other hand, Legh Court, in Cheshire, is the result of a combination of separate features.

As the frame-work of the story is so far real, it becomes the Author to declare that the dramatic action never had any association in fact with the scenes; that the principal characters in these volumes are not portraits; and that the incidents never, to his knowledge, happened in any Lancashire family. He has even thought it prudent to brave the criticism of genealogists, by mixing with the names of the De la Leghs those of other old families, lest any one should be led to attribute the history contained in these pages to branches whose names are as familiar as household words in Lancashire.

The pictures of life in the cattle fair, in the hand-loom weavers' cottages, in the homesteads of the hill farmers, in the halls of the small

yeoman-squires, in the homes of the Puritan manufacturers of sixty years ago, the Author avows to be drawn from his own knowledge and experience. To make these sketches of what he observed in his early youth has been one principal motive with him for writing this tale. But he has endeavoured to subordinate this object to the dramatic action.

The story is founded on the antipathies and rivalries of the ancient gentry with the families enriched by commerce. Sixty years have not passed without a great change, both in the characteristics of the trading classes, and in their relations to the hereditary aristocracy of Lancashire. For that reason, it has seemed desirable to paint a picture of what those relations were in the first few years of this century.

The Hindles are typical of many families of manufacturers, with the whole household economy of which the Author was familiar. If there be anything like a portrait in the volume, it is that of Mr. Hindle and his household. His

daughter is only personally ideal, and in the conditions by which she is surrounded. Her beauty, grace, and accomplishments have been endowments of ladies in families which have rapidly risen, like the Hindles, from a humble and obscure position.

The intention of the Author has, however, not been confined to a picture of society in Lancashire sixty years ago. He has hoped by the story to hold up for admiration the virtues of each separate class, to justify the individuality of their characteristics when they were worthy of approbation, and to expose to scorn their follies and vices.

He has also had a personal pleasure in describing scenes of great beauty, near which he has long lived, and a visit to which will repay the time of any tourist who can appreciate the charms of repose in an English landscape.

68 CROMWELL ROAD, S.W.

*December 1, 1873.*

# RIBBLESDALE.



## CHAPTER I.

SIXTY years ago, no scene brought out more clearly the characteristics of the people of the Lancashire and Yorkshire border than a country fair. As the population and the facilities of intercourse have increased, the ordinary markets have almost superseded these annual gatherings of the people of the district. The shepherds and herdsmen of the Scotch border frequent them less since their flocks are transported by the railway. The travelling packmen, the cadgers with ponies, the wandering tinkers with portable stoves, the braziers, whitesmiths, and knife-grinders with their shandrys, or small carts, and the brush-makers, rug, mat, and carpet-dealers with their vans, are, to a great extent, superseded by the settled tradesmen of

the villages. As the attractions of traffic are less, so also a marked diminution has occurred in the amusements. There are fewer booths, or shows with monsters and wild beasts; fewer conjurors, and quacks mounted on barrels vending their medicines; fewer mountebanks, bands, and games of chance or dexterity. The tradition of the ancient carnival remains—the spirit has departed.

But sixty years ago, the fair at Great Harwood, or ‘Grit Harrod Feaur,’ was the scene of an annual frenzy of business and pleasure. There was, and is still, out of respect for traditional usage, one week’s entire holiday for gentle and simple. There were two or three principal days of the fair, and all the rest of the week was too little to recover from the fatigues, potations, and excitement of this annual crisis of life. To the fever succeeded the collapse. Some days of sauntering in the fields, quieter visits to relations and friends, more moderate drinking, or listless idleness, gradually brought the people back to the sterner necessities of life, and gave time for the sense of duty to triumph over the outburst of the animal instincts.

Great Harwood was an obscure village, where quaint stone cottages, with mullioned windows—two or three with carved porches or doors—lined a tortuous lane, which wound along the slope of a range of hills scarcely reclaimed from moorland, and stretching from Blackburn to Whalley.

Beneath this range, to the west, east, and north, were valleys of exquisite fertility ; but the immediate vicinity of Great Harwood was disfigured by the cold, barren, and wet clay soil of the edge of the coal-measures. The fields were knee-deep in rushes ; many of them were almost morasses. The range of hills close to Harwood was swept by the south-western gales, loaded with moisture. Except the sycamore, the ash, and the birch, few trees could struggle to maturity, unless planted in masses. Consequently, the hill-side was bare of timber towards the south-west, save in the dingles of the numerous streams, whose steep banks were clad with woods of birch, alder, sycamore, beech, and ash, together with small oaks.

To the east of the range, where graceful green slopes dip from the summits of the



‘Nab’ and ‘Bowlee,’ and wooded dingles overhang the bed of the Calder, in the gorge of the Whalley Valley, the scene underwent a beautiful change. The roads about Harwood were narrow, interrupted by steep pitches into the beds of the neighbouring torrents; rut-worn in summer, and almost impassable, except by the rude people, in the winter. It was well, therefore, that the Fair was held in the early part of the autumn, when the weather is often serene. At this fair there was a brisk traffic between the shepherds and herdsmen of the Scotch and Yorkshire border and the farmers of the valleys of the Ribble and Irwell, as well as the rich plain lying on the west of Lancashire. The young stock fed during the summer on the moorland pastures were driven from the fells of Shap and Westmoreland, and from the high moors of the Pennine Chain, to be fattened on the after grass of the meadows of the Lancashire valleys and plains, and to browse on the pastures during the winter. The shepherds and hill farmers who thus assembled were a rough race. The Scotch bonnet and maud, and the tartan scarf and trews, were contrasted with the thick

Yorkshire frieze coat and slouch hat, and the skin jacket and breeches of the half-savage lads, who, with bare feet and legs, and armed with long hazel sticks, actively helped the dogs to keep the flocks together. Nor were the beasts themselves less remarkable. Among them were strings of unkempt ponies, with shaggy manes and long tails, and herds of the long-horned cattle then characteristic of the district, but recently supplanted by the Durham shorthorn. The beautiful breed of the Scotch highlands, and some of the Ayrshire milking stock, appeared in smaller groups. Great flocks of Cheviots, and of the Westmoreland small black-faced sheep, with the 'lonk,' which can jump like a deer, crowded the narrow lanes. There were also dairy stock, brought from neighbouring farms—cattle fat for the butcher—farm horses—a few roadsters—all with their appropriate attendants. The drivers from the neighbouring hills and valleys were a hardy race, half farmer, half weaver, shrewd, unlettered, with abundant superstition and prejudice, and also much sagacity in their limited vocation, meeting, by vigilance, industry, and traditional usages, the daily

necessities of their position. Among these mingled the purely weaving population of the villages and hamlets for many miles round. A lank, half-clad race, with eager eyes and wiry thews, all full of curiosity for the sights of the fair, whether in the wide, rough fields, in which the sheep, cattle, and ponies were assembled, or in the winding street of the village, devoted as much to frolic as to business.

Sixty years ago, there existed in North and East Lancashire a class of yeomen living for many generations on small estates. Sometimes these were farms of a hundred acres or less; at other times the family took the rank of smaller gentry, cultivating a home farm, but possessing also other farms held by tenants. Such possessions were occasionally united by the marriage of an heiress, or enlarged by the superior thrift or enterprise of a small squire. The chief sphere for such speculation had, in former times, been the breeding, feeding, or traffic of stock, and, on the Yorkshire border, of horses. This had led the squireens to be diligent attendants at markets and fairs. They often lived on land scarcely reclaimed from the moors—in solitary treeless valleys, on the bleak

slopes of hills swept by the south-western storms, at the edge of wild cloughs clad with stunted forest timber, and occasionally nearer the rich river valleys, the level pastures of which were sources of wealth to their more fortunate proprietors. They rode, generally, active horses, were booted, like troopers, to the thigh, or wore leathern gaiters from the knee downwards. The more substantial, who approached most closely in position, habits, and education to the landed gentry, were eager huntsmen. They followed the harriers on horseback, or the otter hounds on foot, with a resolution which would have made them formidable in repelling a border foray. These sports were the more popular because the hunting-field is the scene in which all Englishmen like to meet, and, without forgetting the distinctions of rank, to contend for those due to courage, endurance, and skill. Here the smaller squires and more wealthy yeomen came in contact with the titled gentry and those possessing great hereditary property, whose agents only they met at markets and fairs. There was sometimes a hunting dinner in a tavern, when the too common habit of intemperance levelled all distinctions. On market-

days in the large towns, thirty or forty of these smaller proprietors rode into the town. Occasionally the dame sat on a pillion behind her husband. She came to make purchases for the household—he to sell or buy stock or farm produce, to meet neighbours, listen to news, and attend a market ordinary where he often got more to drink than was consistent with coherent conversation or with a steady seat on horseback, as his faithful '*tit*' instinctively found its way homewards through the tortuous and deeply rutted lanes, often in the darkness of a winter's night. The squire's home was usually called a Hall, House, or Lodge. In the borders of East and North Lancashire, these houses are built of stone, two stories high, with mullioned windows, a stone porch with a bay over it, and in families whose position approached more nearly to that of the gentry, there was usually a courtyard on the southern front of the house, inclosed in a substantial wall of ashlar stone with a Tudor coping. A gateway pierced this wall opposite the principal entrance to the house, and was flanked by massive stone pillars, and closed either by solid oaken gates studded with iron boltheads, or, more rarely, by gates of twisted

open iron-work. Behind the house were the stables and homestead of the small home farm.

The Fair at Harwood was attended by yeomen of this class. They came with their herdsmen to purchase stock for the autumn and winter herbage; to dispose of their own fat cattle to butchers; to pick up a likely horse; to hear and exchange the gossip of the country; ascertain current prices; and satisfy their social instincts.

Manufactures had spread over the whole moorland borders of the two counties. The Yorkshire dales produced woollen fabrics, and on the Lancashire side cotton spinning and weaving were mixed with woollen. Many squires and yeomen as well as farmers still had their domestic wants in clothing supplied from their own looms. The time of the sheep and stock farmer on the hills and in the moorland valleys was divided between his farm and his loom. The lads and lasses of the family were each broken-in to the monotonous employment. The rough friezes and broadcloths, the blankets and coarse cotton shirts, the fustian and calico needed for the family, were thus produced among neighbours, and exchanged for mutual

convenience, or brought to market, and there sold or bartered, when they were not, as was less common, the product of one household. The great halls of the ancient families were often built round a court. Within this quadrangle, the ground-floor consisted of domestic offices, in which the spinning and weaving of woollen and linen fabrics and sundry handicrafts were carried on. The fairs, especially, afforded opportunities for the sale and exchange of the flannels of Rochdale, the blankets and baize of Bury, the fustians and calicoes of Blackburn and Rossendale, the friezes of the Yorkshire valleys, and the broadcloths of their more distant great towns. To this traffic many of the booths and stalls of the Fair at Great Harwood were devoted. From many farmsteads came a cart, in which a weather-worn matron, with her blooming daughter, sat on a bale, the year's produce of their looms, to be sold at the fair.

Yet these traditional usages were soon to be extinct. For of late years the loom jingled and rattled in every cottage. The fly-shuttle had been invented in Bury and the spinning-jenny in Blackburn, innovations which were followed

by the circular carding-machine, the throstle, and the more general introduction of the steam-engine, as the motive force of spinning machinery. Consequently a feverish impulse had been given to weaving by the hand-loom. Hot fits of headlong speculation had been followed by financial collapse, or of markets glutted for the time. Each of these seasons found the rude weaving population without any savings, though recently in receipt of high wages. A time of deep suffering from hunger and cold, followed by fever or dysentery, made its ravages among races who, in their straits, not unfrequently broke the peace, plundered the bread-shops, destroyed machinery, or committed some other barbarous folly. This had at least the ultimate effect of teaching the country that the vast wealth necessary for commercial undertakings, cannot be safely entrusted to a sensual unlettered class. The autumnal fairs were not unfrequently the scenes of faction fights between the weavers of neighbouring villages. A feud originated, perhaps, in some real or imaginary insult or injury inflicted by a party from one village on a group from



another. The brawl was inflamed by casual encounters, when the whole weaving population met on foot in the hunting-field, or at a 'rush-bearing,' or 'wake.' It grew to greater proportions even by individual frays, until a challenge was given and accepted to fight out the feud at some fair; or until, without a formal challenge, each hostile village knew that the other would be in force at a particular fair, and went thither with the expectation, if not the intention, of testing the courage and strength of their opponents.

The day of annual festivity and traffic at Harwood broke with a cloudless sky and a serene genial air, which bade all rejoice.

Many of the herds driven from a great distance had reached Harwood, toil-worn and footsore, the night before. But the morning brought many more, choking the lanes, especially on the north and east, with flocks which were with difficulty got on to the ground before noon, though they began to arrive soon after dawn.

Early in the morning, an eager-looking youth, about nineteen years of age, threaded the droves of sheep and cattle descending the

steep road from Bowlee, and with an anxious face sought a small stone house built on the edge of an abrupt declivity near the lane, and close to a hamlet called Harwood Cliff. The house belonged to a class of yeomen who lived on their own farms. It was of a comparatively humble structure, built upon the most prevalent type of the houses of inferior squires, yet, both in size and character, a degree even below these. There was no courtyard in front, but a garden-plot upheld on the face of the cliff by a rubble-stone wall, which also rose about four feet above the level. The usual porch, with the stone seat on either side of its interior, was low and undecorated by armorial bearings or motto. There was a bay over the porch, and a window in each story on either side. The windows were divided by simple stone mullions, and glazed with diamond-shaped panes. The house stood within thirty yards of the road, facing the southwest, and behind it was the 'fold,' containing the barn, shippon, stable, and farm-servant's cottage.

The youth who climbed the steep lane to Harwood was famine-stricken and gaunt, but his pale face was lit up by dark, eager eyes, in

hollow sockets. The cheek-bones were nearly bare, and the mask was like that of a handsome devotee macerated by fasting. As he doffed his cap to refresh his broad brow in the morning breeze, the black glossy hair, tossed by a sweep of his hand backward, had an untrained grace in its abundance, and the large, arched eyebrows, the long eyelashes, and regular profile made the face picturesque. He was meanly clad, but his clothes were scrupulously clean. The features were not those of the artizan class, and in the bearing there was a something not usually the characteristic of a famine-stricken craftsman.

He seemed in deep grief; for, as he eagerly climbed the hill, tears wet his cheeks, and deep sighs and even occasional sobs escaped. With a stout hazel stick he dexterously made his way through the herds of horned cattle. In his left hand he held a tin can swung from a wire handle and covered by a lid. He approached the house at Harwood Cliff through the 'fold,' and moderated his almost breathless haste to a quiet walk as he came towards the kitchen door. Here he was met by a middle-aged servant, who invited him in, placed him in an oaken chair

near the fire, and, in the midst of questions about his uncle, who appeared to be in extreme suffering and danger, told him that her young mistress was dressing, and had directed that he should await her 'coming downstairs,' in order that she might make personal inquiries. During this colloquy flitted into and out of the apartment the bright vision of a pretty, cheerful Lancashire lass of about the youth's own age, dressed in a short gown of printed cotton, which, according to the fashion of the time, descended only a few inches below the waist, leaving a purple and pink linsey-woolsey petticoat, half covered by a white linen apron. This attendant on the 'young missus' flew in and out like a bird, on all sorts of errands, but always with a sweet smile. Our hero's large eyes flashed with unwonted light as this charming girl tripped into the room, making it bright like a sunbeam, the light of which fell with unstinted radiance on him. At her first entrance they exchanged a familiar nod, according to the custom of the country. His poverty and half-starved look could not mar the beauty of form in his handsome face.

The lad and the maid seemed to know each

other well, for she came near him, and seeing his melancholy, asked him in a low voice how the deacon was. 'Badly, Nelly, badly,' was the melancholy reply. 'It's much if he live out the day. But he's set his heart upon seeing the young missus before he flits.' 'It's an awkward day, John,' said the sweet maid, 'to get through the fair. She'll go, you may be sure, but you must tent her well, John. If any ill comes to her, John, somebody will be angry with you.' 'I'll tent her well, Nelly—I shouldn't like Mistress Ailse to meet with any mischance.' She seemed to know her power. Yet through the flashes of a joyous spirit, there seemed also the gleam of a deeper feeling—respect, almost reverence, for the handsome, meagre youth. There was a power in him over the birdlike vivacity of the sweet maid which he seemed too sad to exert at the moment, but which, even in the self-absorption of his grief, the pretty lass acknowledged. Her eye never was off John as she entered the room, though, in his despondency, his own were fixed on the floor. She came once or twice to whisper a word of comfort in his ear.

By and by, the pretty maid and the kitchen

servant were summoned to family prayers. Then the bright Lancashire lass tripped with a tray carrying breakfast into an adjacent room. Shortly afterwards she came in on tiptoe, and said, 'John Spencer, the master and my young mistress will be glad to see you now. Cheer up, John!'

John started to his feet from a melancholy dream, into which he had sunk with his chin supported on both hands, and his elbows on his knees, and followed Ellen. She ushered him into one of the two front rooms. There he found, seated at table, a man past middle age, but ruddy and fair. He had a benevolent though grave aspect, not characterised by energy, but with apparently a power of endurance, and, under the guidance of conviction, a certain tenacity of will.

It was, however, a strange thing to see opposite to him one of the rarest types of womanly beauty and grace. A figure of noble proportions. An oval head, from which, on the fair neck, hung in a net masses of glossy hair, of a rich brown. Features perfect for a sculptor's model—a transparent complexion, mantled with the hue of youth and health. A

bust like that of Raphael's mistress—graceful rounded arms—beautiful wrists, and small nimble, dexterous hands ; a waist not too slender, but expanded into the noble form of womanhood. Still with these characteristics there was an air of simplicity, yet of dignity and self-possession—a look of religious piety, such as rather belonged to the saint of a mediæval legend than to any modern order of female beauty. Withal a homeliness—a gentleness, and humility—an unconsciousness of the wonderful attractions which she possessed—an absorption in the duties of her station—a domestic love and peace, rarely found except among the ranks of the middle class in these religious homes.

Educated in the Puritan faith, in comparative seclusion, her manners had the quietude almost of one who had taken the veil. Out of the circle of familiar duties, religious thought, and habits of self-education, nothing had led her into the outer world. To supply to her father the place of her mother, according to her dying injunction ; to smoothe the decline of his life by her love, vigilant care, and growth in piety, had been her sole earthly

thoughts. The admiration which her beauty had excited seemed scarcely to have awakened her consciousness. She was only aware of its force by the jealousies of those who sought to win her favour. These were among the circle of her own relatives, and in her own rank in life. She was too true not to be grateful for every act of kindness, but there was nothing in her smiles to encourage a lover. Homage was not in itself prized by her. Yet when her eye was uplifted to meet some generous sentiment with a beam of approval, it sometimes dilated so as to prove that within there was a depth of feeling that might try the force even of her faith and reason, if her affections were once won.

Both Alice and her father welcomed John Spencer with smiles as he was ushered into the room. Mr. Hindle bade him take a chair, which he did as near as possible to the door.

‘Well, John, how has your uncle passed the night?’

‘A weary night. He’s been wellnigh dead half a dozen times. Out o’ one swoon into another. Eh! but it’s been a fearful night. Nought but the wine and the brandy and broth as you have given him have kept him quick.’



‘Has the doctor seen him in the night?’

‘The doctor has been some kind for sure. He were with Blenkinsop’s wife, and he came into our place every hour. And it’s my thinking that, under God, yon doctor kept him quick.’

‘Has he ordered anything fresh?’

‘Well, you see, doctors are like captains, they order folk hither and thither.’

‘Well, what did the doctor order?’

‘I’m rather shame-faced to let you know. You see the doctor thinks that if Miss Ailse can take pains to teach such a gaumril as me for so many years learning, and give me charge of the Sunday class when she has made a scholar of me, she’ll maybe step down to my uncle’s, and make him a basin o’ milk and arrowroot, with spice and brandy.’

Alice had turned upon him her beaming face, and, anticipating her father’s consent, she instantly answered :

‘Wait but a few minutes, John, and, with my father’s leave, you shall be my guide through the fair. I shall be very happy indeed to go, and be of any service to your uncle.’

‘I’ll go an’ sit me down i’ the house, till you are done, Miss Ailse.’ So saying, John Spencer left the room, and placed himself in the oaken chair in the kitchen, with his head resting on his hands, and his elbows on his knees, while the tears slowly chased each other down his meagre cheeks. What with grief and gratitude, John seemed often not to hear what the elderly servant said to him, and, when he heard, answered almost in monosyllables. By-and-by, the maid was summoned upstairs. Then, soon after, she descended, and in a somewhat more sympathetic tone, said,

‘I had no notion, John, that your uncle was so badly. You must take good tent (care) of my young missus. Her meikle (like) is not to be found, an’ if she’s marred (spoiled), another cannot be made.’

‘Nay then, that’s as true as gospel, Nelly; I’d rather be burned than aught ill should happen her.’

‘Mind yon long-horned cattle, John; they are apt to be randy (wild), what with the dogs, an’ drovers, and with far tramp and clemming (far travelling and want of food).’

At this moment, Alice entered the kitchen,

and beckoning John Spencer to follow her, they both passed through the back door of the house into the fold, and thence into the road. Nelly's sympathy seemed to suggest that she should watch them forth on their errand of mercy, for when John glanced back from the road he caught a glimpse of the pretty maid, as she nimbly withdrew within the fold.

John had wisely chosen the space at the head of a flock of sheep, and in the rear of a drove of cattle, as affording the greatest security to his fair charge. The colleys and herdsmen with thick staves kept the long-horned Lancashire oxen in front, and it was very unlikely any would turn to bay, or make a rush backwards on the road. They wended their way therefore in comparative safety, exchanging but few words, for the lowing of the herds, the sharp bark of the shepherds' dogs, the bleating of the flocks, and the calls and whistles of the herdsmen, formed a Babel of sound, which distracted attention and somewhat confused the hearing. In this way, they descended the steep hill to the village of Harwood, slowly, and with pauses, which increased in number and duration as they approached

the thronged street. The herd before them, however, gradually wound through the narrow defile between the booths, stalls, shows, and caravans, on one side of the street, and the horses and ponies arranged with their heads to the houses on the opposite side. By keeping rather to the side of the booths and concourse of visitors, they avoided all risk from the horses' heels, and thus by degrees reached the centre of the village, where, diverging to the left down a street which descended the slope to the south, they lost the pioneering of the herd of 'long-horns,' behind which they had gained their entrance into the heart of the fair. John therefore quickly and dexterously took shelter with his fair charge on the side of a caravan, and stood himself in front, holding his hazel stick firmly grasped to await any emergency.

He had scarcely been ten seconds in this attitude, when a young gentleman in a shooting dress, holding in his hand a heavy walking-stick of oak root, passed round the edge of the caravan. A glance of recognition passed between them.

'Those fellows look very savage, and mean mischief, John.'

‘It’s Harwood against Padiham, Mr. Rufus, I’ll warrant,’ said John. ‘I should care nought if I were by myself, but here’s Mistress Ailse coming from Harwood Cliff to see my uncle, who’s at death’s door, and what with the horned beasts behind, and these fellows in front, I’m at my wits’ end what to do.’

‘Did you say Miss Alice Hindle was here?’

‘She’s just behind me,’ said John.

As John cautiously looked down the street, to ascertain in what way its encumbered defile could be passed, a new danger met his eye. Two hostile groups of weavers barred the paths on opposite sides of the street. A struggle had commenced between some of the more eager spirits, and shrill cries of defiance and anger with taunting gestures showed that the factions were about to rush at each other with fury. Retreat was impossible in the face of the droves of horned cattle, half-mad with heat, thirst, the goads of the drivers, and the persecution of the dogs.

The beauty of Alice and her remarkable character were of common fame round Whalley. Occasionally in his rides, Rufus had caught a momentary glimpse of this ‘cynosure of neigh-

bouring eyes'—enough, however, to haunt his dreams with a vision. The stories which passed from mouth to mouth of her charity, and of the purity and elevation of her life, separated her from every other ideal known to him. She seemed by instinct to rise out of the sphere in which she moved, and to form for herself a scheme of action gentle and good, but indicating a large conception of duty. Such a combination was not unlikely to visit the musings of a young man in the first aspirations of manhood. Rufus started, therefore, at the mention of the name of Alice Hindle. He turned round, and in this rough scene saw close beside him a figure like Spenser's Una. A thrill ran through the frame of the youth; nor was Alice unmoved. The young men whom she knew were in her own rank of life. They had been educated with some care; but their features betrayed in the hardness of their lines, if not otherwise, a plebeian origin. The beauty of race often results from the long possession of ancestral wealth, in which the exquisite features of mothers, themselves rare types, are transmitted with a legacy of delicacy of form, colouring, and expression, even in accu-

mulated grace, to successive generations. When these are combined with the vigour and elasticity of an athletic frame well trained to manly exercises, and the flash of mind in the large eye, shall we wonder if a sensitive, truthful woman acknowledge their force at first sight?

The factions had met with a wild rush. They were unarmed, even with sticks, but the method of Lancashire fighting at that time was rude and barbarous. They wore thick wooden clogs, and when they closed these were used mercilessly. They did not simply strike with the clenched fist, but any mode of inflicting injury was fair. The rush had been made from the opposite side of the street, and the party on the side nearest to Rufus gave way before the impetuosity of their opponents. Overborne, but fighting wildly, the whole mass of combatants were driven down on the space where Alice was sheltered. A moment more, and she would be overwhelmed by the tumultuous crowd of maddened men. In an instant, Rufus Noel, with an impulse which seemed an inspiration, caught Alice in his arms, and upsetting a stall, rushed with her from the charge of the factions. The overturned stall he trampled under-

foot; thrust down the next in like manner, and within a few seconds gained a refuge behind some tilted carts.

The action had not been so sudden that Alice had not perceived its motive. She was scarcely, therefore, shocked by the abruptness with which Rufus bore her clear of every obstacle, and only with some injury to her dress and slight bruises placed her, in a few seconds, in a position of security. While she leaned for support on her breathless deliverer, she said:

‘What—what has become of John Spencer?’

Rufus could not tell, and Alice became pale with alarm for her humble friend.

In the confusion, Alice and Rufus lost sight of John Spencer, and where they stood they could not soon ascertain what had happened. There was before them a crowd, tossing and vociferating, surrounding a space in its centre, but they could not discern what was happening within this circle.

Alice’s alarm for John Spencer, which made her lips pale, broke forth in frequent inquiries: ‘What can have become of John?’ ‘Surely, he was not borne down and trampled upon?’ ‘Did you see what happened, sir?’



‘I saw only one thing—I saw you in danger,’ answered Rufus, trembling with emotion, and involuntarily embracing with his arm the charming form which leaned upon him, half-fainting, for support.

Alice seemed conscious of nothing but her anxiety for John. She did not even thank Rufus.

‘Oh, John! What has become of my poor scholar and friend? Oh, sir, he was such a hopeful lad. Surely he is not killed!’

Rufus tried to appease her alarm. All the tenderness of his nature was awakened.

‘He is a fearless lad. I know him well. He carries my creel for me on the Ribble. Depend upon it, he has escaped. He is as nimble as a goat.’

She was scarcely conscious, but gazed with large eyes like a somnambulist on the agitated crowd, expecting the apparition of the mangled corpse of John Spencer. The chivalry of Rufus’s nature was aroused. The noble part of his being was all astir. They stood in this position—he gazing on the half-divine face, and she on the tumult before her—a space long enough to transfix his heart with an admira-

tion, a wonder, a fascination, such as he had never felt before. They were in this attitude when a lady who had watched them from the corner of a booth stood before them. She might be forty years of age, but she was still singularly beautiful, tall, of the purest and earliest Saxon type of beauty. Tresses like yellow silk without one stray grey hair. A complexion so pure, so transparent — lips so ruddy, and features still so rounded with a healthful life, that she might have been deemed twenty years younger, had not the great blue eyes looked out of deep orbits, and two lines on either side the mouth showed that care, and thought, and perhaps grief, had been busy to waste the spring of the fascination of those exquisite features. Those wide blue eyes at this moment, however, glared with an almost unearthly intensity. Her lips were pale and compressed. Her eyebrows were knitted together. Her form appeared to tower upwards like a sybil's. She seemed to be acting under the impression that she was Destiny itself. Yet she apparently placed these emotions under as much outward control as possible. She spoke in a low, tender voice to Alice.

‘My child,’ she said, ‘beware; there is danger in your meeting with this young man. Lean on me; I will support you. Alice, make of my fate your warning.’

This was breathed in a passionate whisper into Alice’s ear as she gradually disengaged her from Rufus’s embrace, and, supporting her sinking figure, fainting with the shock of varied emotions, withdrew her gradually from the tumult.

Rufus, who seemed to know his opponent, submitted to be thus robbed of the Sabine spoil which his courage and vigour had won, but gazed with a wonder-stricken awe on the contrasted beauty of the lady who had come to Alice’s rescue, and with a deep heart-thrill on the saintly form which had just seemed to escape like a vision from his arms.

‘The Witch of Pendle is skilful in her revenge,’ thought he, but he did not resist. ‘What she says is true. My father inherits some of the aversion of his mother for any taint of plebeian blood in our race. Perhaps it is as well she is warned. But I have myself seen a vision which I cannot forget.’

## CHAPTER II.

RUFUS therefore followed Alice, keeping off the vulgar crowd from the pale beauty, who, leaning her head on the shoulder of the lady who had rescued her from Rufus's arms, seemed now unconscious of his presence.

But no sooner were they clear of the throng, than the lady, still supporting for the moment her swooning charge, turned upon him, glaring like a tigress. 'Mr. Noel,' she said, 'do not follow us. It cannot come to good. I warn you while this young lady is unconscious, that I take her under my protection. Provoke me not!'

Rufus looked at her as though she had been Undine herself; so spiritual, yet so terrible, did she become, as she uttered the warning. He had seen in his rambles the singular dwelling chosen by this beautiful woman, near the torrent in the beechwood at Pendleton—

a cottage under a high rock covered by a century's growth of ivy; an exquisite garden-plot in front; the brawling mountain torrent sweeping from the foot of a cascade which fell at the side of the cottage, and roaring in foam round the border of the garden. This wild solitude, tenanted by such beauty and grace, yet such singular force of character, might well be regarded by the vulgar with superstition. And he, who knew her history, wondered at the constancy which kept this singular woman in this seclusion.

‘Miss Margaret Forester——’ he began, but she sternly interrupted him.

‘I acknowledge no name to any of your race but that of Wentworth, which your grandmother and your uncle gave me when they made me his wife—Lady Wentworth—if it be your pleasure, Rufus Noel, to address me by my name. The fraud of your Corsican grandmother cannot obliterate the truth that your uncle for five years believed me to be his wedded wife, and died when he discovered his mother's perfidy.’

‘I know not the details of your history, unfortunate and injured lady,’ said Rufus. ‘I

only know its tragic issues. My uncle's death—your own misery—my father's suspicion that you watch for some moment of revenge.'

'That is a falsehood breathed into his mind by his mother. I seek peace. I seek retirement; but I protect and cherish those who show generous instincts in your family, and thwart the Corsican, especially when she hounds them, as she has hounded me. But even some of those whom I love and protect—for example, your cousin De la Legh—have your family's fatal gift of fascination, which, whether they will or not, works the ruin of women of low degree. Therefore, I warn you, avoid this girl, whose beauty attracts you! Avoid her, I say! Take my warning! She shall not meet the fate of Lucy Girdlestone, though your corpse be found floating in the Ribble like that of the Abbé Salvatore.'

She had not raised her voice, but the blue eyes gleamed with a light like that in the eye of a cat which reflects in a dark place some ray from a distance. The menace was distinct. Rufus shuddered. Was this fair creature capable of such terrible deeds?

Alice had revived just enough to hear John

Spencer's voice, who now approached from the hurly-burly of the rude struggle. His voice had the power of an electric shock. It seemed to thrill through her brain, and to restore her to complete consciousness.

'I hear John Spencer's voice,' she said. 'Thank God! Oh, madam, you cannot know how good and true a lad John is; nor what a mind this poor weaver is gifted with. It would have been too dreadful if John had perished!'

John was at her side. 'It's all over, Mistress Ailse,' said John; 'Justice Petre were lying in wait for them in the "Red Lion," with fifty special constables, and he came out like a man, and drove Padiham folk one way and Harwood folk another, with good thumps of staves.'

'But, John, all this while,' said Alice, reproachfully, 'you forgot that I knew nothing about you. I thought you killed, and that fear, John, almost killed me.'

'I saw Squire Rufus carry you out o' danger, Mistress Ailse, while, like a flood, they drove me into the "Red Lion."'

'Well, John, I'm glad Nelly was not here; poor child, she'd have flown at the crowd herself, I think, John.'

John seemed puzzled what to say. Alice had been leaning on his arm. The fair lady with the golden hair and wild eyes, who had disappeared for an instant, now came back with a glass of wine, which she begged Alice to swallow. The beautiful girl obeyed. At this moment, too, came up a strong vigorous young man, whom the lady at once addressed :—

‘Mr. Robert Hindle, most welcome! I can now at once give your cousin to your care. She has been in a most agitating scene, in which she was saved from danger by Mr. Rufus Noel. But the suspense in which she has been kept about the fate of her attendant here has been more than she could bear. I have just given her a cordial, which I hope will enable her to go with you out of this tumult. Farewell till I see you at Owlett’s Hole, or Pendleton Hall. Let that be soon, Mr. Robert; I have something to say to you.”

Mr. Robert Hindle was rather hard-featured, but not stern in aspect. Yet the deep-seated hazel eye had a calm gaze, and seemed the outlet to the expression of a resolute spirit, ready to affront danger at any moment. There was a frown upon his brow, and his lips were



compressed. He seemed to place constraint upon himself in the presence of Rufus Noel, who still remained; yet he was not able to repress some angry glances of inquiry. The new danger did not escape the sensitive intuition of Alice.

‘Cousin,’ she said, ‘I owe my life to this gentleman, who is, I understand, the son of Sir Herbert Noel. I was about to claim the help of John Spencer, to get through the fair to his uncle’s house, who is very ill. If you will let me lean on your arm, Mr. Noel will be spared all further trouble, excepting that of receiving my father’s thanks for the great service which he has rendered me.’

She curtsied, smiled sweetly on Rufus Noel, and, taking her cousin’s arm, withdrew with him and John Spencer, leaving Rufus transfixed to the spot. The traditions of his family, the dreams of his youth, the purest of his emotions, had all been commingled in one lightning flash of revelation, which had vanished and left the blank of commonplace life before him.

‘The Witch of Pendle and this Robert Hindle always rise up to vex my existence.

She, the cancer corroding our life ; he, with Saxon common-sense, endurance, and constancy, toiling like a tortoise, yet threatening to outstrip the hare. Almost making up for genius and cultivation by his iron frame and will, in our school rivalry. By his weight, wiry vigour, and dogged obstinacy, a match for pluck, science, and ardour. Can it be that this fair creature has given her love to such a man !'

He had clutched his chin with his hand, and was staring at vacancy, when a slight tap on the shoulder roused him. He looked up : there stood at his side a tall, rather spare man in a clerical hat and garb, with highly intellectual features, and a somewhat melancholy expression. Scholar and man of refined tastes were, to all competent to read, written on the calm and pale face. The eyes were in deep sockets, the eyebrows black, and shaggy for a young man, and the brow overhung the cavernous orbits. The nose was slightly hooked, the cheeks thin, and marked by deeper hues than is usual at the age of thirty-five. The mouth was finely cut, and the chin rounded so as to produce a striking profile.

‘Ah! Vicar,’ said Rufus, starting as he turned to find his former tutor at his side. ‘You found me in a strange reverie.’

‘I have seen all that has happened, Rufus. We are too much observed here. Walk with me.’

He put his hand on the arm of the youth, and leading him away to a less frequented street in silence, there resumed the conversation in these words:—

‘Margaret Forester, or, as she ought to have been, “Lady Wentworth,” has reason in her warning, Rufus. I know enough of the fortunes of your family to tell you that you have just encountered one of its traditional dangers. The element of passion and poetry in your nature contends for mastery with the pride of race, the love of distinction, honourable ambition to do service to your country, and, in the meaner scions of your house, with a selfish struggle for advancement. The will of the Noel in the end triumphs, not only by its strength and pertinacity, but because it is inspired by a strange hereditary fire of talent, which seems to burn unexhausted. Beware, Rufus, how you permit your fancy to

be enthralled by beauty and purity, however attractive, in a station below your own ; for I know your race !’

‘Peace, Vicar ! We are hot-blooded, rash, uncontrollable, if you will, but not mean or treacherous.’

‘I said not so. Your race is what you say. It yields to the ideal ; it spurns in its pursuit conventionalities ; but its ideal changes. In youth, it is beauty, tenderness, angelic saintliness of character. In manhood, it is honour at the cannon’s mouth, or in the strife of senates. In age, it is wealth, science, the building-up of the fortunes of an ancient house. These dreams succeed each other rapidly ; and it has happened, as Margaret Forester has warned you, that the dream of youth has been crushed under foot in manhood, and become the remorse of age !’

‘Oh, prophets of evil ! Because you see me rescue a lovely girl from imminent peril, you, Vicar, and Margaret, foresee for her a fate like that of Margaret herself—the victim of my love sacrificed to my ambition.’

‘Even so,’ said the Vicar, gravely. ‘Be warned, Rufus, in time. Your father is now a t

that age when the ambition of your race, its love of wealth and aggrandisement, is most prominent. His pride of family would revolt from a *mésalliance*. He despises these Puritan manufacturers, with their small thrift, anxious gains, and judaical notions of religion. His courtesy as a gentleman would acknowledge the beauty of Alice Hindle. Her grace and purity would tell their own tale to his sagacious eye ; but be sure that he would rather strangle her with his own hand than suffer you to marry her. Ask yourself what alternative there is but the avoidance of a too obvious fascination.'

Rufus struck his brow with his hand. 'I am not in a mood, Vicar,' he replied, 'to listen calmly to reason. Come to breakfast at Mytton to-morrow, and let us fish the Hodder up to Bowland ; by that time, I shall be master of myself, and we will talk of this matter again.'

'We had better,' said the Vicar, 'be on Mytton Bridge an hour after sunrise.'

'Well, then, an early breakfast shall be ready.'

He wrung the Vicar's hand, put his own on a rough stone wall, and vaulted lightly into a neighbouring field, where the Vicar watched him

striding with hurried steps, to get clear of the bewildering sounds of the fair, in order that, by climbing the ridge, he might descend through unfrequented paths to the Valley of the Ribble, and, taking his track, like a deer's, across the Calder below Whalley Abbey, push onwards to Mytton, over hedge, ditch, streamlet, and river. So the Vicar, who knew his habits, divined his purpose, and he interpreted it aright.

The Vicar turned thoughtfully back towards the fair. He walked very slowly; he seemed to revolve in his own mind what it were best to do. The pale face became still more pallid; he heaved an occasional sigh.

‘Strange consequences of error,’ he muttered. ‘There is but one upward path—to strive to expiate the past by the service of the present. Yet how strange the casuistry of life! Can I be faithful to my patron and friend, yet warn this worthy Puritan of the danger which threatens his daughter? Would such an act leave me free to restrain my former pupil in perfect good faith? Should I not risk my influence over him both by diminishing the dignity and earnestness of my remonstrances, and by the possible discovery of my visit to Harwood

Cliff? No, I can do nothing but caution Rufus; it were to the last degree dangerous to give Sir Herbert even an obscure hint. His firm will would exile Rufus at a time when I hoped to repair the past by the lessons of the present. I must watch; I must be faithful; but I must also be subtle and delicate; for this is a race of rare genius, and one error would destroy my influence.'

This soliloquy led the Vicar back to the tumult of the fair, which he had visited in order to greet his parishioners and neighbours, with that spirit of the scholar and philosopher which keeps alive a genuine interest in every phase of human life. He sought to form a just estimate of the objects of his mission, and the mode which a matured experience would point out as the best by which to accomplish them. For this purpose, he had torn himself for a day from his library, his researches, and his contemplation, to mingle with the multitude. This was one phase of his character. We shall encounter others, and find in some of them sources of the melancholy which spoke in his manners and found plaintive utterance in his voice.

Meanwhile, John Spencer had, with his hazel

stick, acted as pioneer and guide through the mazes of the fair to Alice and her cousin, Robert Hindle. She still trembled with agitation, and leaned heavily on Robert's arm, almost supporting herself against his stalwart frame, as she walked with faltering steps through the rude crowd. Fortunately, they had not far to go. In a short time, their guide turned a corner, and they entered a narrower side street, which, in a few further steps, led them to the door of the cottage of his uncle.

John Spencer paused on the threshold, and listened. He held up his hand to caution his friends, and then gently opened the door. They entered. The cottage was small, and almost stripped of furniture. They stepped at once into the 'house-place,' or principal apartment downstairs, serving as kitchen and living-room. There, on a pallet, in the corner beyond the fire, lay Abraham Spencer, the uncle, wasted almost to a skeleton, in the last stage of consumption. John crept to his uncle's bedside, and, kneeling down, whispered to him who his visitors were, and what was their errand. He smiled a grateful welcome to Alice, but he was too weak to speak. Alice herself, exhausted



with the agitation of the exciting occurrences in the fair, needed attention. This her cousin Robert gave with the anxiety and earnestness of a lover. Aided by Mrs. Spencer, he made Alice a cup of tea. The good woman also brought a bowl of cold water, and dipping into it the corner of her apron, bathed Alice's temples and clear brow. The pallor gradually forsook her lips. After a while, she spoke gently to Mrs. Spencer, making inquiries about her husband, and gave her directions as to what she needed to enable her to prepare for him the food suggested by the doctor.

While Mrs. Spencer bustled about the house to prepare the pan, procure the milk, put the arrowroot and spice, which Alice had brought, on the table within reach, together with a basin, spoon, &c.—Alice had sat down on a stool by Abraham Spencer's bed, exchanging with him a few words of consolation. Presently she rose, took from her reticule a white apron, which she put on, and removed her bonnet and cloak, disclosing her noble figure; drew the sleeves up her fair round arms, looped her gown, and entered, with the skill of one well accustomed to domestic work, on her culinary

preparation for the dying man. Robert Hindle sat in the window, gazing like one fascinated on this vision of beauty and charity. John had crouched on a three-legged stool at the foot of his uncle's bed, with his chin on his hands; but started up from time to time to aid his aunt in bringing some needful thing.

By-and-by, the arrowroot and milk were ready, and Alice approached the sufferer, and fed him herself, sitting on a stool at the side of the bed. The spice and stimulant mingled with the food revived the dying man for a while. The collapsed features became less livid; the expressionless eye showed some vitality. He took the meal very slowly, but ere it was completed he had stretched out his hand and clasped Alice's in his own. He gazed long and fondly on her. He held in the other hand a sealed packet, carefully tied with a blue ribbon, which, as he revived, he placed in Alice Hindle's hands, saying,

‘Thank God, oi’m spared to keep moi vow! Thou’lt give this, Mistress Ailse, thysel’ to th’ Vicar o’ Whalley. It’s fro’ John Spencer’s mother—moi sister Keziah; hoo said, if ought happed me, oi were to gi’e this to th’ Vicar boi

a trusty hont (hand). He were to brake th' seals, and read what's insoide.'

'I will do your bidding, Deacon,' replied Alice, tenderly. Then, after a pause, she said : 'You feel better now?'

'I can give thee moi blessin' afore oi goo hence. When I wake up, the angel of the Covenant, that carries me to the New Jerusalem, winnot, oi trow, be fairer than thee, thae dear daughter in Christ.'

'Put thy hands upon me, Deacon Spencer, and give me thy blessing, then, while thou hast strength, for I have sore need of God's guidance in this perilous world.'

'Thaer't born o' pious parents, bred i' th' faith o' Christ, nurtured on t' milk o' t' Word, trained i' works o' charity — thae'rt like John Bunyan's Mercy, weel favvered and tender; but there are serpents under posies (flowers). The wrath of God will scathe the head of him that does thee wrong.'

'Oh, I seek not that, Abraham! I seek your prayers that God would inspire and guide me; keep my heart pure by His Holy Spirit; strengthen my weak woman's nature to meet the tempter and rebuke him, though he come as an angel of light.'

‘Prayer and faith! moi sweet wench—  
prayer and faith mayn (make) the feaw fiend  
floi’ (the foul fiend fly away).

‘Yet “the effectual fervent prayer of a  
righteous man availeth much.” Pray for me,  
Abraham, ere thou partest, and bless me; for I  
have need of the prayer of the saints and of  
the blessing of the faithful.’

The dying man beckoned to his nephew and  
to Robert Hindle to approach the bed. When  
they were near, they kneeled down close to the  
pallet. Abraham stretched out his hands and  
placed one on the head of each of the young  
men.

‘Harken to the last words of a deein’ mon!  
Mistress Ailse’s feyther is simple-moinded and  
ould. Yo are young an’ sharp. Look yo to’t  
as nae ill chance haps Mistress Ailse. Yo’re  
both honest lads. Yo’dn other on yo dee  
(you would either of you die) for Mistress Ailse,  
I warrant. An (if) ivver there wur a saint i’  
this warld, it’s this bonny wench, Mistress Ailse.  
Yo’ cannot dee for owt i’ this warld hafe (half)  
as good. Moind yo’ tent (guard) her weel.  
And, nae, as yo’ done (do) this i’ God’s fear,  
may His blessin’, and t’ blessin’ o’ him as is

ready to perish, rest on thee, Robert Hindle, an' on thee, nevvey John !'

'Amen !' said both the young men, reverently. Then after a pause they rose up and withdrew.

'Nae then, moi daughter in Christ, the hope and angel of the Church, come nigh me.'

Alice kneeled at his side.

'Thae'rt surely an angel kneelin' deawn theer sae sweet and sae calm. Thae'rt coom to tache me hae to dee (teach me how to die). Oi cannot look on thoi face, beaut a glimpse o' heaven. O ! there is a rest for the righteous ! Thoi face tells me sae ! Thae hast surely a foretaste of the future blessedness !'

'I feel by thy side, Deacon Spencer, in the presence of the other world. Haply I reflect by God's goodness its light to thee. Thou knowest it is very near ; it is only veiled. Thou art gifted then at this hour to see on me the light that comes through the veil.'

'Surely it mun be sae, an' oi shall see it face to face ere sun-deawn' (sunset).

'Then with whatever power the prayer of a righteous man hath, let thy prayer, Abraham, be for me.'

‘Keep this maid, O Lord!’ said the dying man, uplifting his hands and eyes, ‘from o (all) sin. Keep her by thy grace pure and good. Let her life be that o’ thoi saints, a life o’ faith and hope and charity. We axe (ask) not worldly weal—we axe that, an it be in the fire o’ trial, temptation, an’ de-ath, thae would’st keep her as thoi saint, an’ bring her to thoisell. Nae—moi last breath bless thee with the blessin’s o’ th’ Covenant, moi daughter in Christ!’

He sank down on the pillow, fainting. They bent over him, anxiously watching the infrequent heaving of the chest. In a quarter of an hour he had ceased to breathe. His last act had been to stretch out his hand to his wife, who held it till he was no more, and then bowed her head, weeping, on it.

There was a dead stillness in the room. If anyone there had ears for this world, if the consciousness of each was not gone with the spirit of the departed, they might have heard a little Dutch clock tick vulgarly the seconds, in one of which a man had ceased to live. It still marked the time with mechanical units, which had lost their significance to him who

had put on immortality, like a garment of light, leaving his wasted corpse, like a beggar's worn-out cloak, upon the bed.

How long they knelt they knew not ; nor how long they might have knelt. The rudely opened door, and the tramp of a heavy step on the floor, disturbed them. The collector had called for the weekly rent. The man's voice was naturally harsh. His occupation was a rude one ; he could afford only scant measure of time. His summons, therefore, was brief and peremptory. Ere he had discovered that death was in the room, he had become impatient ; till Alice turned upon him her sweet face, and pointed to the bed. The man retreated softly to the door, whither Robert Hindle followed him, and paid the rent for the ensuing month in advance. He was rewarded as he re-entered the room by Alice's smiles. She left her purse upon the table, and, taking her cousin's arm, withdrew him from the house.

'There is a quiet way from field to field, cousin,' said Alice, 'if you will open the gates, and help me over a hedge or two.'

'Gladly,' said Robert, whose supremest delight it was to be thus rewarded by

Alice's confidence. 'It would not be pleasant to encounter the riot of the fair after such a scene.'

'At length the long struggle is over,' said Robert, as they entered the field. 'These eight years has that weak frame battled with poverty and disease. Unlettered, feeble, my father says, from birth; scarcely able to earn half a weaver's wages; requiring so much service from his wife, that she could earn little or nothing; unwilling to accept alms, even from the congregation—he has had no joy in life but his faith, for he has not had strength enough even to teach his nephew.'

'John, however,' said Alice, 'has shown a strange ardour for instruction. To learn is with him an instinct. His work at the loom has lately kept his uncle and aunt, yet he has been constant at the lessons which I have given him.'

'You have half-weaned him from our dialect, cousin Alice, and made his eager, handsome face beam with thought.'

They came to a hedge, in which Robert searched for a suitable gap, and mounting to the top of the bank, drew Alice up by her hand,



and then sprang with her into the field on the other side.

‘Many a time, cousin, have we as children gathered hyacinths, anemones, foxgloves, and lilies, in the woods at Whalley. Do you remember the happy days, cousin?’

‘Do I not, Robert? How could I forget them! My dear mother was with us then, in spring-time and summer. Her memory comes back to me when I think of those rambles.’

‘Do you remember when we made a Robinson Crusoe cave in the thicket, and boiled our tea with a fire of the dry sticks which we had spent many days in gathering?’

‘Oh, yes! and my father, too, joined our frolic.’

‘We were but children then, cousin, but the hopes of that spring-time of life have taken deep root in my heart. It would be hard that they should all wither. Yet as we grow up, Alice, we see less of each other. My own pursuits become more absorbing. They have something in them which hardens, but does not polish. I fear a ruder outside is covering me. But within, cousin, my heart is still the same as when I

asked you to be my child-wife in the Whalley Woods.'

'I know it, Robert, and it is for the comfort of both that we should cherish a cousinly regard. We trust each other. We seek each other's good. More than this is beyond our control.'

'So you have told me before, cousin, and so I find, for my life is possessed by one chief thought, to make the playmate of my childhood—my cousin Alice—my child love—the wife of my manhood.'

'You must not press this, Robert, for we are friends. Let us be friends for life. That friendship gives us opportunities of kindly intercourse. That I can acknowledge no other feeling may be my misfortune, but I owe it to you, cousin, and to myself to be sincere.'

Robert was silent.

They had come to another hedge, and he sprang to the top of the bank, and handed Alice over as before.

'Our friendship is deeply seated, Robert,' she said; 'it strengthens with our years. Nothing can, I hope, shake it. We know its sincerity, its constancy, and that it has stood every trial.'

I shall need your help, and I will not fail to claim it as frankly as you offer it.'

'There is nothing which you could ask of me, cousin Alice, which I could refuse. To obey you—to work for you—to suffer for you, if you would permit it—would be simply to put my affection to its most welcome proof.'

'Though I may not seek any such proof, Robert, I may feel that I know you have a brave, true heart, ready to defend the weak, and to accept cheerfully their burden, even though you should carry it all your life.'

'Assuredly, whatever task you put on me, cousin, I will devote my life to discharge.'

'I will give you a proof of my confidence in your friendship, cousin, ere long.'

These words were spoken as they entered the lane where it ascends the steep hill to Harwood Cliff. The road was now comparatively clear, for few were yet returning from the fair. The afternoon was not far advanced. They climbed the abrupt path with rapid steps, to avail themselves of this interval, and were soon in the garden-plots before the modest dwelling called Harwood Cliff.

‘Come in, Robert, and take an early dinner with my father. It is about his hour.’

‘Gladly, cousin Alice;’ and Robert Hindle entered the low stone porch with her, and disappeared through the door at the bottom of its recess.

The Vicar of Whalley had not walked far, with pensive brow and preoccupied mien, before he met successively several of his parishioners. Brief chats occurred with each, about their families, their concerns, their business at the fair, or the interests of the parish or neighbourhood; and these conversations broke his moody introspection, and turned his thoughts on the outer world. As this change took place, his cheerfulness revived. Occasions for counsel, for aid, for restraint, presented themselves. Each seemed eagerly embraced. He had an almost feverish impulse to grasp every opportunity, lest it should pass unimproved. Then there were intervals in which he could turn his speculative gaze on the rude groups by which he was surrounded. The burly squireen, the weather-beaten hill-farmer, the shepherd, storm-beaten and stiff, the simple-minded, quaint yeomen of

the dales, the shrewd cattle jobbers, their rough, coarse drivers, the knavish horse jockeys—all came under the review of his keen and penetrating eye. Then the loud tumult of the public-houses, the flushed faces of many of the herdsmen and farmers, who had given way to the temptations offered during a long wrangling bargain—probably won by him who had most self-restraint—the bray of the bugles and cornets-à-piston on the stages of the shows, the tricks of the conjurors, the feats of the mountebanks—each received a passing glance. From all he sought to gather some insight into the state of civilisation in which his lot was cast, and to form some conception of the mode in which his message might best be delivered, and his personal example and influence might be most usefully directed. In these intervals of observation, the fine features of the Vicar resumed their habitual melancholy expression.

In this mood, he disentangled himself from the crowd, and, climbing the ridge towards Whalley Nab, made his way across the fields towards the woods at the summit. From the ridge, the view is extensive and remarkable. To the south, Hamilton (or Hambledon) looks like a high tableland surmounted by a hugd

tumulus. Boulsworth lifts its round summit on the horizon of the south-east. Between these are the highlands of Worsthorne, Cliviger, and Todmorden. On the left, towards the east, is the swelling mass of the high moorland of Pendle—in the recesses of which the green valley of Sabden lies between the mountain and the heights of Padiham and Read. The park-like character of the slopes, the high cultivation of the river valley through which the Calder and its feeders flow, the rich foliage of the woods filling the water-worn dingles and cloughs, the noble woods and surrounding country-seats, fill up the mid-distance and foreground. Looking down the steep slopes of the Nab into the gorge between Bowlee and Clerk-Hill, the Calder is seen rushing impetuously through a ravine, on the edge of which, in a most picturesque position, the fair mansion of Morton Hall has, since the period of our story, been built. Beyond this, the valley of the Calder to Whalley is one of the most charming scenes of woodland beauty in the North of England. Both Whalley Nab and Clerk-Hill, on either side of the verdant level at the margin of the stream, are clothed with umbrageous woods of noble forest trees, interspersed with

more open portions of the demesnes, in which the herds and deer stray among lofty beech, sycamore, and lime, feathered to their base with grand arms and boughs. Where the river emerges from the gorge, it is spanned by the arches of the bridge of the still rural village of Whalley, with its quaint church tower, and the adjacent embattled gateways, and massive, though crumbling, ruins of its once powerful and extensive Cistercian abbey.

Still westwards and northwards lies the green valley of the Ribble, and beyond it the hills of the forest of Bowland and Waddington Fell.

This was a favourite haunt of the Vicar in his moods of self-examination. Here he stood on a point from which the scene just described could be to a great extent commanded. His brow was bent almost on his breast, so melancholy seemed his thoughts when alone.

Sir Hubert Noel had been his patron, and had given him the vicarage of Whalley. He had also liberally augmented its slender income by confiding to him for several years the preparation of his only son Rufus for college. In order that Rufus might not want incentives to

vigorous application, Sir Hubert had urged the Vicar to select from among the most wealthy of the families of the neighbouring squires and manufacturers a limited number of youths to be the companions of his studies. The Vicar eagerly availed himself of these opportunities to augment his scanty income, for he had debts, partly contracted in the legitimate expenses of his college career, and partly the results of association with the heir of the De la Leghs. He hoped, by self-denial and faithful labour in his school, to lift from his thoughts the oppressive load of debt, sometimes inconveniently, and, in such a case, rudely urged.

Was this the only cause of his melancholy?

The thoughts which we are privileged to know, though they were unspoken, will give the reader a glimpse of other causes.

‘Surely these Noels have a supernatural power of fascination,’ thought the Vicar. ‘I felt it when I first encountered the young Viscount Wentworth at Cambridge. His facile genius, his grace, his courage, his frankness, and the ease with which he admitted those whom he valued to the equal privileges of his friendship—these qualities were most seductive.



He was first in every trial of skill or thought to which he gave his attention ; yet never with any apparent consciousness of superiority. Ah ! I was too young to discover how deeply seated may be the egotism of an essentially epicurean character. His love of classical literature and science made him a fitting companion for one who, like me, had brought from his father's rectory the heritage of exact learning, and habits of close application ; but the lavish expenditure suitable to his birth and fortunes—in horses, excursions of pleasure, under various pleas of archæological and geological research—was an example that—how bitterly I regret it now !—made a deep inroad upon my future resources. Nay, the excitement of such intercourse and pleasures, combined with my own eager pursuit of university distinctions, strained my strength—exhausted my nervous power. I was scholar, medallist, wrangler—the fourth, but I failed to be within the privileged three, chiefly, I think, for want of the physical endurance required to meet hours of mental tension. That, in my case, was a heavy price to pay for the friendship of a viscount, even though that intercourse was illuminated by genius !'

‘But the arrears of debt, the worry of vulgar claimants for the money-cost of such a friendship, the interruption to the life which I had led in my pious father’s home, though without the taint of degrading vices, involved me in dissipation of thought, intellectual power, and an anticipation of future resources which time can but inadequately repair.

‘But worse remains behind! Worse a thousandfold! What madness was it that induced me to invite the young viscount to my father’s rectory? Had I not felt the fascination of these Noels, who unconsciously make everywhere their victims? Certainly I acted solely from impulse—from the emotions of a youthful friendship. My father consented, because he knew nothing of Lord Wentworth but his brilliant university career, and his intimate friendship with his son. He might have had a parent’s hope that such a noble connection would be useful in promoting my own success in life, yet he was so unworldly that I conceive he yielded rather to a father’s affection—to his desire to afford me the enjoyment of my friend’s society.

‘Shall I ever forget the evening when Lord

Wentworth first sat at my father's table, and I witnessed the involuntary attraction between him and my sister Lucy? A pang which was prophetic contracted my heart. There seemed some glamour in the power which created at once a relation between them so sensitive that no act of either was indifferent to the other. My sister was like a flower turning to the sun. Her large liquid eyes beamed with an intuitive homage whenever they durst glance at Lord Wentworth. Her maidenly consciousness of this kept them, therefore, for the most part, downcast or averted. But his voice seemed to make her thrill—her own was subdued in reply. He was full of admiration for her delicate beauty, which seemed truly the shrine of an exquisitely feminine nature. My father, in his old-fashioned way, saw not beneath the surface. He thought Lucy embarrassed by the courtly manners and attentions of the young lord. But I saw it all. I strove to make his visit brief. I kept them as separate as I could. Then, failing to get Lord Wentworth away, I induced my father to send Lucy abruptly on a visit. The mischief was done; the fascination on both sides was complete. In the trial of

sudden separation, Wentworth had sought and found an opportunity to avow his love, and received from Lucy a confession of her own.

‘ Oh, merciful heaven ! How hast thou punished the errors of my youth ! My sister is in her grave ! My father a solitary, palsied man, heart-broken and dying ! and I—I probably owe this vicarage to the influence of Lord Wentworth with his uncle, Sir Hubert ; and to that also I owe Sir Hubert’s friendship and help. But I am a man scathed by the bolt of heaven ! My mission to this parish is enfeebled by grief and remorse. I must bear the vulgar burden of debt, whose pressure might degrade and injure me. De la Legh knows nothing of this, or he would be too glad to mitigate his own remorse by removing all my remaining embarrassments. But no—I can owe nothing to one whose fatal influence cost my sister her life. That were, indeed, to accept a price for blood ! I must return good for evil. I watch over this young Rufus. I warn him of the hereditary errors of his race. In securing the well-being of others, I strive to expiate the past. For these vulgar, yet harassing debts, I pledge my

exertions in my school—I consume the midnight oil in literary exertion. Thus, a few years' toil, if I can keep the wolves meanwhile at bay, and I shall be free. Heaven is just! It is a righteous award. Out of this Avernus the way is steep, difficult, and long; but none return from the grave. Oh, Lucy, Lucy! is thy spirit near me? Hast thou no tender word of forgiveness for thy brother? He did not wrong thee willingly. Surely thou wast snatched from worse things to come!'

He buried his face in his hands, and wept bitterly. By-and-by, becoming more calm, he looked round to see whether there had been any observer, and pursued his solitary way down the slopes to Whalley Bridge, and thence home to the Vicarage.

## CHAPTER III.

THE Vicar had such a knowledge of the family history as to be aware that the Dowager Lady De la Legh, the grandmother of Rufus, had exercised an absolute will in its destinies. She had not quailed before the sacrifice of her eldest son, in the most tragic manner and with true Corsican perfidy, to the pride of race and the ambition of family aggrandisement. He suspected her of having hardened her second son's heart, when he succeeded to the title, against the marriage of Lord Wentworth—her grandson, and the Vicar's college friend—to his sister. Yet he thought it possible that even this second son might have been unable to meet the remorse caused by the sacrifice of new victims to this unflinching ambition. The death of his son's affianced bride, Lord Wentworth's voluntary exile and abandonment of a brilliant intellectual career, might have hastened his

father's death, though they had left the grandmother unshaken in her purpose to permit no plebeian alliance, and to bend all the energies of her descendants to the object she had at heart. This purpose, baffled by her grandson's refusal to return to England, was probably recorded in the testament of her son, and in the legacy of designs unfulfilled which he had left for his brother, Sir Hubert. Knowing all this, the Vicar looked for the interference of the grandmother in the destinies of his charge, Rufus. But hitherto she had either been satisfied with his training, or the time was not come when the hand which had been so fatal to the family happiness was to interfere with Rufus Noel.

Yet, from time to time, significant evidence transpired that Sir Hubert brooded over his brother's instructions, and pondered the destiny of his son. The Vicar sought to hold himself free from any entanglement which might prevent his offering perfectly independent advice. He was therefore somewhat disturbed when, on arriving at the Vicarage, he opened and read the following letter from Sir Hubert Noel :—

‘MY DEAR VICAR,—I need your pardon for

some over-officious zeal on the part of an agent and solicitor whom I have employed for my nephew, De la Legh, to settle some of his college debts. He found some insignificant claims outstanding against you, and knowing De la Legh's friendship for you, and my own strong regard and confidence, he has been rash enough, without your sanction, to discharge them. I make you aware of the fact as soon as I know it, for it transpired to-day in the settlement of our accounts. I have paid Steadman, and I hope you will allow me to be your banker till it is quite convenient to you to reimburse me. I am much more in your debt than this small matter, and should be glad if you could forget it, of which, however, I despair.

‘Do not write in answer, but do me the favour to breakfast here in the morning. I expect to hear then of Rufus's position, and hope to confer with you about his future pursuits.—Yours sincerely,

‘HUBERT NOEL.’

The Vicar was unspeakably annoyed. He knew from an old college friend, who had employed an accountant for the purpose, that the



claims of tradesmen against him amounted to £2,000. He at once resolved that he would not be in Sir Hubert's debt to this amount. Was this the first evil suggestion from the Corsican grandmother, made to entangle him in an unwilling subserviency to the designs as to her grandson of which Sir Hubert was to be her instrument?

The Vicar was abroad early in the morning, invigorated and refreshed by a quiet sleep. His reflections had made him master of his position. He attributed all that was unpleasant in the proceedings to the bungling of Steadman, owing to a too zealous construction of the hints which had been given him, before personal communication with Sir Hubert, and before he had discovered what a devoted friend the Vicar had in his college companion Falconer.

Reassured and calm, the Vicar walked at a gentle pace, suited to contemplation, towards Mytton Hall. He had shouldered his fishing tackle, and strapped a havresack on his back, to fulfil his engagement with Rufus. Naturally, his thoughts reverted to him. How soon would Rufus have to launch into all the great contests

of life ! How many contingencies might involve him in schemes of family ambition—of political intrigue—of the struggle for power or fame ! Was his impressionable nature well fitted for these rude conflicts ? His career at college had been, so his friend Falconer assured him, pure and distinguished. It was about to close. It was expected that the results of the University examination would crown it with honour.

It was not unnatural that the father should look with deep solicitude on the first steps of his son into public life. Something might be pardoned Sir Hubert on this ground, even if all his suspicions were correct. He was glad to arrive at the Hall in a mood of mind in harmony with the friendship which had always subsisted between the family and himself.

Sir Hubert received him in the dark oak entrance and dining hall of the mansion. The whole of the centre of the house was occupied by this remarkable room. The roof was borne by the span of Gothic arches of oak, springing from corbels between the windows on either side. The mullioned windows of domestic Gothic had simple diamond panes, without escutcheons or shields. The fireplace was a hearth under

a huge and rude stone arch surmounted by a massive mantelpiece. At the western end of the room was an oaken screen, richly carved ; and above it a gallery, which served both as a passage to neighbouring apartments and for music. Behind the screen was the approach from the porch ; and to protect the Hall from the cold outer air, some tapestry hung over the entrance to the screen and to the porch itself. The walls were everywhere richly panelled in oak. The furniture of the room was in keeping with this architecture. In the centre, opposite the fire, a massive oaken table was covered with an ample breakfast. Carved chairs, in walnut, ebony, and oak, of varied patterns, with seats covered either with tapestry or embossed velvet, occupied different parts of the floor. A side-board of oak was placed against the panels of the eastern end, and encircled with silver salvers, tankards, and family plate. Between the windows, and on either side of the fireplace, were bundles of halberds, which had been borne by the javelin men of the baronets, who had successively served the office of Sheriff. There were also two suits of ancient armour at the eastern end of the Hall.

Sir Hubert received the Vicar in his usual frank and courteous manner. He was a man of about middle height—with a fine intellectual cast of face. He had a high brow, regular features, and must have been, when young, very handsome. Now the healthy, clear florid complexion contrasted with the perfect whiteness of his hair, whiskers, and imperial. Under the equally white and bushy eyebrows gleamed a large eye of a deep hazel colour, speaking of health and vigour, and also of a calm decision and energy of character. His manners were courtly, without being formal. He had the happy power of placing every person at ease, without loss of dignity.

Rufus was in the room when the Vicar entered, and welcomed him with his accustomed warmth. They sat down to breakfast, and the conversation flowed without a ripple, except what served to reflect the wit and genial humour of the host.

During his walk over Billington Hill, and across the Calder to Mytton, Rufus had in some degree recovered his self-command, not a little shaken by the events of the fair. He was exactly at that point in life when the emotions

have their most dangerous force, because they are little held in check by a knowledge of the impediments to the fulfilment of the wishes which they suggest, from the interference of the complicated claims of social tradition, family interests, and the opinions and feelings of those who have hitherto guided all the course of life. At College, a young man like Rufus has, for the first time, found his intelligence and will triumphing over difficulties, and shaping his career. It is not an unnatural inference, until checked by experience of the multiform difficulties of life, that he will open the shell of his future fortunes with the same sword, and eat his oyster with the same exertion of will, that has crowned him with academic honours. The first entrance of young men on the scene of their future labours and trials wears therefore, to those who have had a larger experience of life, an appearance of presumption. Sometimes ardour may be mistaken for self-confidence; self-reliance and enterprise for the shallow defect of vanity, or of an overweening estimate of mental power. Rufus was very far from being vain; but he was rashly ardent, swayed by his emotions, and confident in the results of his thought. No

other word will describe his condition, after his sudden encounter with Alice Hindle, than that he was *possessed*. That beautiful apparition had come to him as out of the illuminations of a mediæval legend, or from another world. He had never seen anyone like her; he had never believed that anyone so out of the common types of life could exist, except in a painter's or a poet's dream. Then why should he not obey the impulse of his nature? What meant those warnings uttered by Margaret, and solemnly repeated by his former tutor and friend the Vicar? What obstacle could he encounter which could not be overcome by the will and energy of youth? There was no necessity for early action. He would allow the Vicar, if he sought to do so, to repeat his warning, and would then ascertain, with greater certainty, what were his motives, and to what dangers they pointed.

Reflecting thus, he arrived at home more calm, and having sought his room to change his dress, found on the table a letter, which he at once recognised as in the writing of his cousin, Lord De la Legh.

‘CINTRA : 18—.

‘MY DEAR RUFUS,—Congratulations. Falconer tells me that you are sure to be among “the three,” if not the Senior Wrangler, as well as high in Classics. My excellent friend the Vicar deserves our gratitude for having given such an impulse to your career. Falconer also says that you have lived like a gentleman, but have contracted no debts. So much the better, dear Rufus. I was not so wise ; I was an extravagant dog, and formed habits of self-indulgence which will make me a sybarite for life. Now, dear Coz, don’t throw away my letter because I am going to be somewhat more grave than usual. Here am I, an eccentric exile from my country, because I began my life with a series of errors. Fatal, though generous, impulses brought me into conflict with what was my natural career, alienated my father, perhaps shortened his life, blasted my own happiness, and have left me a wanderer trying to make of the toad remorse a palatable supper, by the aid of sundry epicurean condiments. The fact is, my dear Rufus, I can’t digest my toad when I have swallowed him. Now to business. You will ease my conscience if you will use your

utmost dexterity to become my almoner without divulging my secret.

‘You will not lose your respect for our most excellent friend the Vicar when I tell you that he was my chum at Cambridge, and that, in my thoughtless career, I led him into expenses beyond his limited means. It is only very recently that I have ascertained from Falconer that his debts are not even yet paid. He could not accept any assistance from me ; for, to my own soul’s hurt, I have been the cause of the only evils that have reached him in life. I meant it not, dear Rufus. But it is done, and ought, if possible, to be atoned. Now, among other things, I wish to free him from this burthen of debt. I know the independence of his character to be such, that I am sure he would not accept such help from Sir Hubert. I do not therefore suggest it to your father. But he has watched over you with rare solicitude. You have formed with him an enduring friendship. For your sake, I would cement this friendship by the strongest ties. I think it just possible that he might accept from you a temporary aid, which he would refuse from Sir Hubert. If he insists on giving you



security, consult the delicacy of his nature by taking it. Take any that he can offer without embarrassment. Never think of the repayment of the money, if you can by any means not unpleasant to him evade it. I have placed to your account with the Blackburn Bank a credit of £2,000, which I conceive will free the Vicar from all present difficulties.

‘When you have, as I doubt not you will, found out how to carry my wishes into effect, ease my mind by writing to your

‘Cousin and Friend,

‘DE LA LEGH.’

This letter caused Rufus much reflection. He saw many more difficulties in the accomplishment of Lord De la Legh’s wishes than his cousin was disposed to acknowledge. He thought it very doubtful indeed whether the Vicar would accept such assistance at his hands; certainly he would not from Sir Hubert, lest it should in any way interfere with the discharge of his duties, either in the parish or neighbourhood. Probably he might, on other grounds, be averse to alter his relations with Rufus. He had been a most faithful monitor; would he

endanger in any degree his influence or impair his right to counsel and warn? Certainly not. How, then, could he represent the proposal to the Vicar so as to disarm him of these objections? The solution of this question, if possible, was by no means easy. He paced about his room in thought. As he approached the window, at one of these turns, just at the edge of dusk, a horseman rode up to the Hall. Thinking it might be a messenger from some neighbouring family, he scrutinised his features. It was Steadman, the Cambridge attorney! What could he want at Mytton Hall? Had he business with Sir Hubert about Lord De la Legh's affairs? Unless Steadman asked to see the son, he had no right, even in his thoughts, to pry into the affairs of his father. He therefore resolutely sat down to read by his fireside; but he could not fix his thoughts. Lord De la Legh's letter and Steadman's visit to the Hall were strangely linked together in his mind. If the Vicar were unduly pressed, if he were in grave danger of an indignity, or in circumstances which would make him dependent upon men whose knowledge of the world he might dread, might he not, for a short time, for a few months, accept

from him—an inexperienced and unworldly youth—aid, which he would repay, after that brief interval, without any embarrassing weight of obligation? Rufus began to see his way. A servant came to inform him that Sir Hubert would not dine, but would sup at nine o'clock, and to ask him what refreshment he would take. 'A cup of tea—I will join Sir Hubert at supper.' There was still time to reflect and to observe.

Sir Hubert, too, had, on the day which opens our narrative, found much cause for reflection. The morning's post had brought to him also important letters; first he opened one from Lord De la Legh, and read as follows:—

‘CINTRA.

‘MY DEAR UNCLE,—I have letters from Castle-maine urging that, while my humour keeps me abroad, I should place in your judicious hands the management of my borough interest. I have only two wishes to express on the subject. The first is, that you will use one of the boroughs to secure a seat in Parliament for my cousin Rufus; and the other, that whatever party you support, you will stipulate, as the *sine quâ non*

of your aid, that our friend, the Vicar of Whalley, shall be made a bishop as soon as possible, and meanwhile, if other claims are in the way of the bishopric, that the first very good deanery vacant shall be his, as a step to the Bench. Rufus owes much to the Vicar. His career at Cambridge has been brilliant. This is an admirable introduction to public life. After all, my father's intention to have a Prime Minister in our line may be fulfilled in him. All I doubt is, whether Rufus will break in well to the collar. Be gentle with him, my dear uncle; your blood horse understands neither stripes nor impatience. You will have your own way by gentle expedients, but anything else will lead to flat rebellion, and make him a wanderer, satisfying only his æsthetic and literary tastes, like your unworthy, but obliged nephew,

‘DE LA LEGH.

‘P.S.—I have written to Castlemaine to express my own wishes about the Vicar, which, I doubt not, will be zealously seconded by yours.’

Sir Hubert laid down the letter with a sigh; he then broke the seal of one from Lord Castlemaine :—

‘MY DEAR SIR HUBERT,—I took the liberty of suggesting to your nephew, Lord De la Legh, that while he pursues his travels, he should place in your hands—with whatever arrangements you may be able to agree upon—the management of his borough interest. This he gladly consents to do. For himself, he says that he has only one favour to ask, viz., that his early friend, the Vicar of Whalley, who has also, I understand, been the tutor of your distinguished son, should be regarded as one in whose promotion your family take a deep personal interest, and whom you strongly recommend on the ground of his learning, piety, and exemplary life and labours.

‘I shall be on my way through Lancashire to Scotland in a few days, and I will send my courier to ask whether it will be convenient to you to give Guendoline and myself luncheon. We can talk these matters over for an hour at Mytton.—Ever yours faithfully,

‘CASTLEMAINE.’

After breakfast, the party sauntered for a while in the Hall, and Sir Hubert—when his son had left the room to prepare for the fishing

excursion—withdrew his guest, step by step, towards his library. He closed the door. They stood for a while in desultory conversation, looking from the window down the steep bank on which the house stood, on the picturesque combination of the river, spanned by the bridge; the opposite hill, covered with embowering woods; the road, just visible through the thick foliage and flecked with streaks of light; the ivied tower of Mytton church; and the grey walls of old Mytton Hall. It was a scene of rural peace and seclusion. The Vicar felt its calm penetrate his spirit. He was unambitious. He had one thought now—to be faithful to the charges which God had given him, his pupil and friend Rufus, and his parish. When, therefore, Sir Hubert invited him to take a chair, with these words—

‘Vicar, I owe you a deep debt of gratitude for my son’s success at Cambridge. I have reserved for your private ear the intelligence which this morning’s post brings, that he is Senior Wrangler’—

‘I pray God,’ said the Vicar, reverently, ‘that this may be an earnest of a life of usefulness and honour.’

‘Rufus is everything my fondest wishes could desire, Vicar! Your anxious trust has been so discharged as to give you a rich reward in him, and to make my family your debtors for life.’

‘My hopes, Sir Hubert, are, by humble service, to obtain that peace which we are assured passes knowledge. There is that in the past which I desire to bury under the labour of the present, so as to have hope in the future.’

‘I understand you, Vicar; but let us believe that in Rufus you have a friend to replace in the future what has failed in the past. Let us hope, also, that you will not be indifferent either to his success in life, or to the wider sphere of usefulness which may open both to him and to you.’

‘For myself, Sir Hubert, I think I can truly say that my mind is made up to obey no guidance but that of God’s righteous Providence in any sphere, however humble, in which my lot may be cast. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity afforded me to train your son, and still more for the measure of constancy with which I may have been enabled to fulfil that duty. That it has been crowned with the suc-

cess which you have announced, was God's will. May that success have His blessing !'

'I have long wished to speak to you confidentially of my plans about Rufus's future career. My own estate has been greatly augmented. It is possible that Rufus may succeed to the earldom. My brother, foreseeing such a contingency, expressed a wish that he should be early trained to politics. He suggested, in a memorandum left for my guidance, a diplomatic career. His connection and friend, Lord Castlemaine, is our Minister for Foreign Affairs, and would promote such a scheme. I am anxious to have your advice on this plan.'

'My chief anxiety would arise from the corrupting influence of foreign Courts on the habits of your son.'

'I have the same scruple, Vicar. Castlemaine's friendship for our family is such, and the influence which we wield through my nephew Earl De la Legh's boroughs is so important, that I should not apprehend any difficulty in the choice of the Mission or Embassy to which Rufus might be attached.'

'He certainly ought to travel as much as



the disturbed state of Europe may permit him to do,' said the Vicar.

'Just so. My own notion has been that this service would combine a form of political training with the experience of life and men acquired in foreign travel.'

'I cannot gainsay that view.'

'But here lies my difficulty, Vicar. His career under your guidance has been most prosperous. Would it be possible to persuade you to confide your parish for a couple of years to the care of some college friend of exemplary life, and to accompany Rufus as chaplain to the Embassy?'

'That, Sir Hubert, is a proposal which involves so many considerations, that I trust you will permit me to mistrust my own first impressions, and to seek for guidance in reflection.'

'Certainly. For the present I shall be more than content if you will permit Rufus to resume with you his reading of Modern History, while he rubs up his French and German, with some competent assistance.'

'This temporary arrangement requires no reflection, Sir Hubert. I accept the trust as a new proof of your regard, and as a fresh

opportunity in which to fulfil the most pleasant task of my life.'

'We agree, then, in this preliminary view. I would not too precipitately expose Rufus to the temptations and trials of foreign service in one of our Embassies. But his sensitive nature must be hardened for the duties of life. His training requires delicacy, but also firmness. If he is to fulfil the career to which he was destined, when my brother made him in a great degree his heir, he will require nerves of whipcord, and a will of iron.'

'In all this, Sir Hubert, you may at least reckon on my utmost solicitude for Rufus's well-being; and also on my desire that I may be enabled, on reflection, to second your wishes. If I find that I cannot act as their true depository, I will be faithful to you, and you will, I know, be forbearing to me when I make the confession. You can then, if it be your pleasure, place my relations with Rufus under any limitations which you may deem needful.'

'Spoken like yourself, dear Vicar. And now for the slight affair about which I wrote to you last night. I am settling De la Legh's

accounts. Gratify me by making me your banker, and pray forgive Steadman for his well-meant, but rather officious services.'

'You will, I am sure, Sir Hubert, permit me to speak with perfect frankness. You trust me with such delicate relations with your son, that I feel deeply I have your entire confidence. Let me retain my independence, lest I should at any time doubt how far I was acting rather out of gratitude to the father than a single minded sense of duty. I will in a few days, with your permission, discharge this debt.'

'Very well ; but you need be in no hurry, Vicar, in repaying this advance,' said Sir Hubert, with a slight change of tone, which did not escape the Vicar's sensitive ear. He felt that he had escaped an embarrassment, if he could really raise the money in any reasonable time.

'A few days' delay,' said the Vicar, 'is all that I hope to need.'

'Be it days, weeks, months, or years, it is a matter of entire indifference, Vicar. Your scruples shall be respected ; but I should prefer that everything should tend to bind closer together our co-operation in life. On your part all duties

have been fulfilled with singular skill and fidelity. I had hoped for this opportunity, I will not say to repay part of a long arrear which my family owe you, but to give you a further proof of our entire respect and confidence.'

'Such sentiments are to me, Sir Hubert, a reward inferior only to the approval of my own conscience, and the discharge of my duty to Heaven. But though I cannot accept the aid you offer, the proposal itself I regard as a sign of your wish that our confidence should be deeply rooted and lasting.'

'It is in no degree abated by the sensitive delicacy of your own feelings, Vicar,' replied Sir Hubert. Yet he fidgetted about the room, as though in search of some papers, and rang the bell. Instead of a servant, Rufus appeared, and, to the Vicar's great relief, the conversation was not prolonged.

Rufus was ready for their excursion. They bade Sir Hubert good morning, and walked forth to seek the banks of the Hodder, intending to reach Whitewell at nightfall, whence the Vicar proposed to walk to Lancaster, through the trough of Bowland, on the following day.

The day ought to have belonged to April with its alternate gloom and sunshine. They were soon on Hodder bridge, where they intended to commence their sport. The Vicar had been unusually absorbed and silent, and Rufus had respected his friend's pre-occupation.

They soon separated on the stream, up whose beautiful banks they slowly advanced, till an hour or too past mid-day, solely intent on their sport. Then they met on the summit of a wooded bluff, round which the river wound, and sat together on some moss-covered boulders to eat their luncheon. After some examination each of the other's creel, and some talk about their comparative success, Rufus said—

‘Vicar, a bit of luck has happened to me. I never had any money at my command beyond my father's ample allowance until yesterday. When, lo, and behold! suddenly I find that I am possessor of 2,000*l.* which I want some kind friend to take care of, lest I should be intoxicated by my accession of fortune and dissipate it like a fairy's gift.’

‘I think you would certainly do well to husband it till you have some legitimate want to satisfy.’

‘Ah, that’s very well, Vicar, to talk about, but unless you help me with your advice I am as likely to lose it in the effort to secure it. You remember the story of the old miser’s hoard, which he lost in a crevice of the wall, and pulled down his house to recover.’

‘You could scarcely apply to a less competent adviser on such a matter than I am,’ said the Vicar.

‘Well, but two heads are better than one, and, by the same rule, I suppose, three are better than two. I have half a mind to ask my tutor Falconer, who is shrewd enough to find me a security, and give me his note of hand for the cash.’

The Vicar started. His whole frame quivered with a nervous tremor. Certainly Falconer had not betrayed his secret to his pupil, but certainly Rufus knew his necessities, and sought to relieve them. A flash of intuition occurred which revealed to him, as he thought, the whole combination.

‘Rufus!’ he said, ‘there ought to be no fencing between you and me. Deal frankly with me. Tell me that Lord De la Legh sends you this money?’

‘Vicar, I can withhold nothing from you, and although it may defeat your friend’s design, I must answer you truly, that my cousin did send me this money.’

‘Did he not send it, rather fearing that I would accept no aid from him to relieve me from the embarrassment of some debts, but thinking that I might consent to receive it from you?’

‘You really have a power of divination, old friend. You know I always accuse you of reading my thoughts. Some strange relation there surely is between us, for I can keep no secret from you.’

‘So much the better for both of us, Rufus. Lord De la Legh made a double error. I could not consent to accept such aid from you, Rufus, towards whom I have the greatest reasons for preserving my independence, in order that I may be free and conscience-clear in all my relations ; but this debt is that part of the price of my friendship with your cousin which is yet undischarged. There was a time when it would have been impossible for me to accept any such assistance from him ; but I have striven, according to my poor power, to make myself, with

God's help, a new life. I should feel more free to live for you if this debt were cleared away. You may write to Lord De la Legh, if you like, Rufus, to say, that I have now no scruple in accepting his personal help in this matter. Tell him that you are the bond which confirms and renews our ancient friendship, and that my fidelity to you must now and hereafter be the proof of my constancy.'

'You give me daily proofs of your anxiety for my welfare. Such I must interpret to have been your warning yesterday, though I did not understand it. Is there anything in my cousin De la Legh's personal history so disastrous that you fear to encounter some similar passage in mine?'

The Vicar made no reply, and when Rufus turned, after a pause, to ascertain the reason of his silence, he was astonished at the sudden pallor of his friend. Thinking he was attacked by illness, he hastened to untie his cravat—remove his hat, and was about to descend to the stream to bring some cold water, when the Vicar assured him that he was recovering. He would have said more. Doubtless, the two friends were on the verge of an explanation which



might have exercised an important influence on the future career of the youth. As it was, the Vicar had scarcely uttered a few almost incoherent words. 'Bear with me a while, dear Rufus, and I shall be equal to a duty I have not yet had courage to discharge.' And again, 'We have approached the subject abruptly; but though the pang be too great for my weakness, I shall in a few minutes be restored.' And as Rufus was about to leave him to bring the water, 'It is needless; this faintness is best cured by a moral remedy. My conscience reproaches me that I have not warned you more openly. It was a dastardly shrinking from pain.' He held his pupil by the hand, and they sat together on the knoll, where the Vicar, half reclined against a large stone, gradually regained his equanimity and strength. The explanation was at hand; when, as fate would have it, a light elastic figure of a man in a large sombrero hat, suddenly hailed the Vicar from the thicket through which he was struggling close at hand. He had a fair sanguine complexion with tawny whiskers, eyebrows, and hair, a high broad forehead, small quickly scrutinising eyes, features full of motion and frolic, altogether an air at once

graceful, gay, and fantastic. He had in his hand a net to catch moths and butterflies ; round his shoulders a tin box was slung by a strap, to receive botanical specimens, and a garden scoop was in his hand to dig up roots.

‘ Ah ! ah ! The Vicar of Whalley cannot reprove the parson of Ribchester for the worship of Flora. We, are, I fear, both pagans in our love of this open page of Nature.’

The Vicar had roused himself with a great effort, and, turning, said :

‘ Maskeleyne, we have some luncheon left to offer you, which will not be unacceptable if you are as much fatigued as I am.’

‘ So you seem. I don’t care if I do attack your viands. I have walked from Ribchester along the front of Longridge further than I intended ; but I was this morning released for the day from my long watch over my poor wife by the arrival of her niece, Alice Hindle.’

Rufus quivered as though he had touched a torpedo.

‘ Her aunt says that she ought to have been the head of a sisterhood of charity, so gentle is her mien and so saintly are her ways.’

‘ She has been brought up among the old

Presbyterians, has she not?' said the Vicar, scarcely knowing what he said.

'All communions of the true faith, my friend, have their saints; and wherever Alice Hindle had been bred, she would have had the same sweet nature.'

'What brought her to you so early this morning?' said the Vicar.

'She had long wished to come to nurse her aunt, and it seems that yesterday she was in some danger in the Harwood Fair; I know not what. Her father thought her pale and ill, and brought her for change of air to Ribchester.'

'And she—did she wish to come?' said Rufus.

'Her father's anxieties now only seconded her desire.'

The Vicar and Rufus were both silent. Maskeleyne discussed his luncheon; he then displayed to them, with many fantastic comments and grimaces, the treasures which he had found—in a card-box, butterflies and moths pinned carefully on to a flat piece of cork; from his tin case rare flowers, the habitat of which was familiar to him; these he brought forth with real feeling, but with a quaintness of phraseo-

logy, and a singular vanity of manner, which seemed to imply that no one could estimate their beauty and value as he did. All that he touched he seemed, in his own estimation, to hallow; everything gained a new claim to admiration from his praise. Nature herself was but an unacknowledged rural beauty, until he made her the fashion by his patronage. He pulled from his pocket a sketch-book, and exhibited some clever outlines of the scenery of the valley, and some drawings of trees, which had been part of the amusement of his morning's walk. Not satisfied with this, he drew from his portfolio some verses, ingenious but odd, which he had brought with him to ascertain whether they would revive in some favourite spot the emotions under which they had been originally written, not long after his marriage.

It was a relief to the two friends to let the singular though accomplished man rattle on. His vanity was greater than his wit or humour, but he had both in some measure. His garrulity knew no bounds. The afternoon waned while this talk flowed like a babbling stream. The Vicar's faintness suggested that they should not pursue their sport further up the Hodder. They

therefore slowly retraced their steps, and ere long struck the road to Hodder bridge. Here they had not walked far before they were overtaken by a farmer's shandry, on which the Vicar and Rufus returned to Mytton, while Maskeleyne pursued his own way back to Ribchester.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE emotions which Alice Hindle had suffered in the fair had almost exhausted her there. Yet, aroused by the death scene in Deacon Spencer's cottage, she had walked home with Robert Hindle apparently calm and well. She had met her cousin's renewed avowal of his early love with a gentleness which conveyed to him the consciousness of every sympathy short of that self-devotion which is the characteristic of love in women of a temperament like hers. She had even invited him, with the confidence of near relationship, to enter her father's house. She did not know to how severe a strain her highly-wrought sensibility had been submitted. Under such tension, something had given way.

Alice had scarcely led her cousin Robert into the room in which her father was sitting, when, from the change of temperature, or from whatever cause, she turned pale, and, leaving the room

suddenly, scarcely reached her own private apartment. There, the open window and some remedies, together with the homely solicitude of her father, who had come to her aid, gradually restored her. After a time she asked her father to read to her. She probably knew that he would read some passage from the Scriptures. He opened a Bible which lay upon her writing-desk, and read from it. She thanked him in a low voice and with closed eyes. As he sat by her side the twilight deepened. Nothing was said. She seemed to breathe slowly and calmly, as though at length she slept. Giving her maid a charge to watch, Mr. Hindle left the room, to ascertain from his nephew whether anything had happened in the fair to account for this faintness.

From Robert Hindle he received an account of much that had occurred. The rush of the factions; the singular presence of mind, promptitude, and vigour of Rufus Noel, and his own interference; the walk to Deacon Spencer's cottage; the death scene—all these were related. Was it tenderness to the father's feelings which restrained him from saying anything of the warning of the lady popularly called the Witch of Pendle? Why did he suppress

the conviction that this casual meeting between Alice and Rufus had penetrated both with a sentiment which time and absence alone could remove? Why did he withhold the fact that this conviction, and the necessity for decision in his own plans, had caused the renewal of his own avowal of love? His nature was frank. Nor was he restrained by sensitive delicacy. The daily intercourse with the rough world of reality had blunted in this respect the finer sense of youth. But he had a stern vigour and uprightness of character. Rufus had been, as we shall see, his rival under the Vicar's instruction. He seemed to be destined to be his rival in love. He scorned all meanness. Whatever were the consequences, his lips were sealed. No warning could reach the father from him. Though he could not devote himself to Alice as a husband, he had much tenacity of purpose. There was no second Alice Hindle in the world! No other should possess the life and heart which he had once consecrated to her!

Mr. Hindle, after conversing for some time with his nephew, bade him cordially good night. The father was aware of Robert's affection for his daughter. He could not but suspect that



some unconfessed emotion might have mingled with the surprise and terror of the rush of the combatants. In any case, on the morrow, if she were restored by sleep, he would, at an early hour, avoiding the crowd and bustle of the fair, carry her away to some quiet retreat, where change of scene and air, combined with some new interest, might revive Alice from the consequences of this shock. As he reflected, it occurred to him that his daughter had been solicitous to visit her aunt, Mrs. Maskeleyne, at Ribchester, who had been so ill as to cause the apprehension of a death as early as that of his own wife. Alice longed to nurse and minister to her. Mr. Hindle had resisted her wish, chiefly because he feared for Alice's own strength, already taxed by her work in the cottages of the poor, and in the schools. But these doubts gave way before the urgent need of an immediate plan. Nothing better suggested itself. On the morrow, therefore, if she were strong enough, and if the weather were favourable, he would take his daughter to Ribchester. So slight are the threads by which the web of our fate is woven ! One by one they are intertwined : silently but surely they become strong.

With the earliest dawn Mr. Hindle approached the door of his daughter's room. It had been left ajar, for she had permitted no one to remain in her apartment. Hitherto her health had been such as to develope to the highest degree her beauty, both in form and in feature. She had a noble figure. But the life of religious contemplation and charitable self-devotion, and the very metaphysical subtlety of the creed in which she had been reared, had tended to give to the sentiments a dangerous force. Her inexperience of life beyond the limited circle of her father's family was absolute. Her mother and her aunt had been the daughters of a clergyman, and had been highly educated to fit them for the position of governess in families of rank. From her mother, who had died about a year before the opening of our story, she had received a most diligent and careful training in sound knowledge and various accomplishments. She sang sacred music with power, she sketched with great skill, she was a good botanist, she was well acquainted with English and Italian literature, above all she was well read in the history of the Reformation, of the religious struggles of the Commonwealth,

and in the works of their divines. As we have said, that which had displaced the balance of her high-wrought intelligence on the side of imagination and sentiment, was the peculiar form of religious teaching prevalent in her father's communion. This, to an insight as keen and far-reaching as that of Alice Hindle, revealed the awful claims of an ever-present spiritual world, on which she gazed with the eye of an unshrinking faith. She accepted absolutely the alternative of the future, eternal doom or blessedness. Her spirit strove to realise the spiritual life which, even here, disrobes itself of the garment of flesh, and anticipates immortality by purity and prayer.

Mr. Hindle listened at the door of his daughter's room. Never before had any interruption to her health occurred. Her life had been calm like a lake sheltered among hills, a mirror reflecting the light of heaven. The simple-minded, kind father had not slept. He had observed that in his daughter's expression which passed the limits of all his conceptions. What was it? He knew not. He therefore approached with caution. As he listened, he heard a loud whisper in his daughter's room. He

opened the door gently, and approaching her bed, found her sitting up, with large speculative eyes staring upon vacancy; her lips parted, and from time to time uttering, in a clear whisper, disjointed sentences. He stood unconsciously watching the phenomenon. Gradually he could distinguish the words, 'My mother left me this legacy—to watch over my father, to fill her place in his home as his daughter. I will not leave him. No one shall take me away. To him, to the widows and sick of the church, to the children of the Sunday school, to the orphans and the friendless, I will give my life . . . My father, and my Father in heaven! they have my love. I have no love to give.'

She sank down upon her pillow, and as her father took her hand the ecstasy seemed to dissolve. She awoke; and with a smile assured him that, though she was weak and weary, she was better. He proposed to prepare for her an early breakfast. Her maid appeared, and tea was soon brought. By-and-by she seemed cheerful and natural, and as the morning light became clearer, her father was strengthened in his resolution to try the effect of a change of

scene and air. About eight o'clock, therefore, they were in his open carriage. They climbed the hill over the Nab, and he led his horse down the precipitous and stony road to Whalley Bridge. Thence they drove without accident to Ribchester.

They found Mrs. Maskeleyne improved in health. She insisted that her husband should enjoy one of his usual rambles to botanize and sketch while she had the advantage of the company of Mr. Hindle and his daughter. Her husband was easily persuaded to take this excursion. He was volatile, and variety was necessary to his existence. He pined in routine. His wife's illness was a shadow on his life. The comparative solitude of his residence was sadly increased by her incapacity to join as usual in his pursuits. He was vain, and, though a man of varied superficial accomplishments, shallow. He had no solid learning nor habits of research which would have rendered such leisure as he possessed a treasure. He was, therefore, essentially selfish. To escape for the day to the woods, to wander along the Ribble, to sketch his favourite landscapes, to collect specimens for his herbarium, to stretch himself

on a bank, and read some of his own verses, or to lose himself in some dream of romance on a knoll overlooking a long reach of the stream—these were temptations irresistible to him. His wife knew it. She knew the wants of his life. She therefore so placed before his fancy the opportunity which the beautiful day and the visit of Mr. Hindle and his daughter offered, that he was soon forth on the excursion in which we have seen he encountered, some hours later, the Vicar and his pupil many miles away on a bluff of woodland overlooking the Hodder.

Mr. Hindle remained until the following day with his brother-in-law's family. Nothing occurred to alter his impression that this change would be beneficial to his daughter. He, therefore, left her with her aunt, who was now well enough to be a companion to her within doors. Her uncle and she had also common pursuits in botany and sketching, and she requested to be permitted to accompany him in his visits to the aged and suffering in the scattered homesteads of his parish. This mode of life seemed to promise a healthful variety. Alice acquiesced in it for a time, on condition that her father would also join the family circle

at Ribchester as often as possible. Reassured, therefore, by his daughter's apparent tranquillity and well-being, Mr. Hindle, about noon of the day succeeding his arrival, drove back to Harwood Cliff, where his business and farm required his presence.

The life in the parsonage was spent much as had been intended. Alice took charge of the household for her aunt, often read aloud to her, walked with her uncle along the banks of the river or to neighbouring farms, sketched and botanized. The restless disposition of Mr. Maskeleyne soon exhausted the new sources of pleasure which he had in the society of his niece in these familiar scenes and pursuits. One morning, his wife, remarking some symptom of the weariness of routine which soon made life dreary to him, suggested that he had not taken Alice to visit the college at Stoneyhurst; and enlisting Alice's acquiescence by an expressive glance, an excursion in an open carriage was then projected. A basket of sandwiches for luncheon, sketch-books, botanical cases, &c., were prepared, and at an early hour Mr. Maskeleyne and his niece set out on this excursion. They visited the college. There Alice

had a long conversation with the Superior on the religious orders. Then they ate luncheon on a seat among the walls of clipped yew in the garden. Here her uncle told Alice the tradition of the loss of the last heir of the house of Sherburne, who was said to have been poisoned by eating the berries of the yew-trees under whose shade they were reposing. He suggested that they might, by slightly varying their route home, visit the chapel of the family, in which the tombs of successive generations gave proof, in their rich decorations, of the wealth and pride of the house which was thus represented by sculptured escutcheons, marble statues, and recumbent alabaster figures in the armour or costume of the time. Here, too, was the statue of the boy whose premature death ended this long line of ancestry. Maskeleyne had exactly that kind of narrative power to make such a legend interesting. Alice was captivated by the thought. The name of the chapel never transpired. As soon, therefore, as they had eaten their luncheon they pursued their way to Mytton Church.

Even when they arrived at Mytton, Alice did not know the village, so little had she been away from home... Whalley, Clitheroe, Sabden,



had been the limits of her excursions ; but it so happened that she had not diverged from the valley of the Ribble towards Bowland. She was charmed with the view from the churchyard, down on the wood embowering the road to the bridge which spans the Ribble. The square keep of Clitheroe Castle, on its prominent rock, was at once recognised. So also the huge grassy flank of Pendle—the rounded back, whose outline almost hid the great head lying prone towards the north-east. The quiet of the green valley, with the music of the lapse of waters, and the murmur of a gentle breeze in the trees, spoke of such settled peace that Alice was scarcely startled when her uncle drew her attention rather abruptly to Mytton Hall, almost hid by the great yews and the sycamores on the high bank beyond the bridge. She then, however, withdrew abruptly from the churchyard, scarcely waiting to observe some curious relics which her uncle pointed out. In the church she seemed to follow his description of the tombs, his explanation of the inscriptions, armour, costumes, and heraldry, but chiefly she was attracted by the statue of the young heir, the story of whose untimely death had beguiled

her to the church. From the Chapel of the Sherburnes her uncle led her to a turret staircase, and without explaining the object, groped his way before her up the spiral steps entwining the stone newel, until they reached the leaded roof of the tower. There she persistently gazed up the valley on the distant keep, and on the hills, where the bracken was beginning to red-den to its autumnal hue. She seemed so much absorbed, that she made no objection when her uncle proposed to leave her here for a few minutes, until he brought his horse from the little inn where it had been eating some corn while they visited the church.

Alice remained in her posture, gently leaning on the battlements of the tower. She was in a deep reverie. She had not proposed visiting Mytton. She had even some difficulty in disentangling the little chain of trivial circumstances which had brought her thither—the last place to which she would consciously have come! She was a little troubled, and wished herself away. It was during these thoughts that her uncle had left her, with only a half-knowledge on her part that she was there alone. As she looked on the tranquil valley and the

bright gleam of the reaches of the river, she forgot everything in the silent teaching of the scene. How long she remained in this reverie she knew not, when the step of some one emerging from the spiral stair on the roof aroused her. She turned to greet her uncle Maskeleyne, and encountered the astonished gaze of Rufus Noel.

The amazement of Rufus was at least equal to her own. Both were taken by surprise. In both, therefore, self-possession was suddenly assailed by emotions. To both it was at once evident that this meeting was unexpected. Perhaps not unwelcome, but, perhaps also, to have been avoided. In the ears and hearts of both still rang the utterances of warning, and in that of Rufus the remonstrances of earnest friendship and experience; while in Alice maidenly reserve and sensibility shrank from one to whom nature and opportunity had given such a power over her. Rufus stood for a moment confused and shocked.

‘Forgive me, Miss Hindle,’ he said, ‘I did not know that you were here! My sudden appearance has alarmed you! I am unfortunate. I fear I have reminded you of the danger you encountered in the fair! I am grieved

that I should be the source of any trouble to you ! Indeed—indeed—no one can see you without a sort of worship ; you seem to have all the gentleness and goodness of your sex without any of its vanity or weakness ! I cannot but rejoice to have seen you, and know you even a little, for it gives me higher thoughts of what a woman may be !’

These words had been uttered at intervals, while Alice, subdued by surprise and alarm, could make no sign, and give no reply. She was for the time powerless. “She was, however, conscious of his presence, of his words, of their meaning and involuntary utterance.

‘Sir,’ she said, ‘I thank you again for the promptitude of your help in the fair. The shock was very great to me ; for I have been brought up in a humble and retired station, and had never before been so tried. The thought of it, even, is too much for me to-day.’

‘I know it,’ said Rufus ; ‘you will pardon to me, too, the rudeness of my sudden interference. But, how could I see you suffer without succouring you ? Also, to-day, you have something to forgive. I would as soon violate a sanctuary as intrude rudely upon you, Miss Hindle.’

‘I believe you, sir. Everything you say and do proves to me that you are frank and true. I have nothing, therefore, to pardon. I would only have you remember that the shock caused by the affray in Harwood Fair may be renewed by your presence, which seems to remind me of it.’

‘Could I have imagined that you were here, Miss Hindle, believe me, that I should not have ventured to approach you. I am accustomed on still and sunny days to read in the afternoon on this tower. May I not hope, Miss Hindle, that you will soon forget the almost tragic scene in which we first met, and that you will soon admit me to a more familiar acquaintance without any painful recollection.’

‘Our paths in life, sir, are very different. Our bringing up does not fit us for such acquaintance, even were it otherwise seemly and convenient. Your rank, wealth, and expectations, point to a career in life in which, whenever I hear your name connected with your honourable deeds, I will remember gratefully that you once rescued so humble a maiden as myself.’

‘I thank you, heartily. If I have won a

claim to such a remembrance it will be, I assure you, an incentive to prove myself worthy of it—a restraint from the impulse of every lower motive—a secret reward for every effort or sacrifice for truth and honour.’

‘O, say not so, sir!’

‘I do not hope ever to meet anyone whose approbation, next to that of Heaven, would be to me so full of reward as your own.’

‘Sir, sir! these are not words which I ought to hear. Ask yourself, are they words which you ought to speak? I have said it; you have my gratitude,—my respect, but——’

‘I know what you would say,’ interrupted Rufus. ‘Forget what I have involuntarily spoken. Permit me the privilege of occasional intercourse.’

‘That cannot be. You have said more than I ought to have listened to. May God forgive me! I know not how this happened.’

‘It has happened without our will. Why, then, will you not regard it as the leading of Heaven?’

‘Speak not with presumption, sir! Ought I not rather to regard it as a snare of the Evil One?’

‘I never felt under the power of a nobler and purer impulse than that which possesses me wholly at this moment. What is there to separate us but the selfishness of ambition, the pride and vanity of life? Are these powers of Heaven or earth? Does the tempter put on the guise of self-abandonment for virtue and truth?’

‘He has the power, sir, to array himself as an angel of light. I beseech you speak no further with me.’

‘You will not forbid me another interview? I know that you are living at Ribchester with your uncle. If I may say no more now—and I respect your wish—I must see you there. You must deliberately, and after reflection, decide on what has become to me the critical question of my life.’

Alice gazed upon him with a look in which tenderness was strangely mingled with fear. Could she shrink from what might prove to be a duty? Could she send forth this young man, reckless with the impulse of a rejected affection, to affront the world, having dried up the fountain of a virtuous love in his heart? She heaved a deep sigh; then, after a pause, she said—

‘I scarcely know what to answer. I have

no right to refuse your acquaintance ; but whether we may meet again I dare not say without time for thought.'

'Take time, Miss Hindle, to reflect. I would by no means have you resolve hastily. It is enough for me that you know the emotions and hopes which you inspire. I feel that, having seen you, I never can love another woman as I ought to love my wife.'

Alice uttered a half-suppressed scream, and would have abruptly left the tower, but at that moment Mr. Maskeleyne emerged from the spiral staircase.

Even this shallow and vain man who now entered on the scene could not fail to observe that his niece was agitated. He was himself surprised to find Rufus Noel there ; but having heard only generally of the occurrences in Harwood Fair, he did not know that Rufus had acted so prominent a part in rescuing Alice from the danger, the agitation consequent on which had been assigned to him as the cause of her illness, and of the need of repose and change of scene which had led to her visit to Ribchester. But a glance suggested to his romantic fancy that the truth might have been partially con-



cealed from Mr. Hindle—unconfessed even to herself by Alice—and that an unexpected interview with Rufus might have revealed to both, for both seemed much disturbed, the strength of emotions hitherto suppressed. With a rapid glance of retrospect he reflected, Can they have met before? Is this but the crowning circumstance of a series of incidents? He had no time to think further, before Alice, summoning to the utmost her self-control, advanced and said—

‘I owe to Mr. Noel, Uncle Maskeleyne, my life, for he rescued me in Harwood Fair from a danger of which you have heard. He came rather suddenly to the tower while I was alone, and the recollection of that day has renewed the shock to my nerves. But I am better now, and ready to go.’

‘I am very much grieved,’ said Rufus, ‘that I should have unwittingly intruded on Miss Hindle during your absence. It is my custom to read here on calm afternoons.’

‘It would not be easy to repay what we owe you, sir, if, as I gather from my niece, you rescued her at Harwood Fair. She must naturally be much disturbed by your sudden appearance here, for her peril has hurt her health, I fear.’

‘I am, however, strong enough to go down the stairs, with your help, Uncle Maskeleyne, now,’ said Alice, putting forth her hand to claim her uncle’s aid. She turned to Rufus and smiled thoughtfully, and, as it were, mournfully, upon him, as though bidding him adieu, and, drawing her uncle towards the stair, followed him, with the help of his hand.

Rufus stood for a moment hesitating and impatient. Then he reflected that, if he would obtain an interview with Alice, this must occur at Ribchester. He would descend. He would ask Mr. Maskeleyne’s permission to call to enquire as to the health of his niece. He followed and overtook them in the churchyard. There, as Alice had slightly preceded her uncle, he could the more easily retain him a few paces in the rear. He rapidly explained that he felt much troubled to have caused Miss Hindle a painful surprise by his sudden intrusion. He said that he should feel much annoyed if the consequences were otherwise than transient. Until he was quite assured of this, he should be uneasy. As he was often at Ribchester, fishing in the Ribble, he trusted that he might be permitted to call on Mr. Maskeleyne, and ascertain

that he had not been so luckless as to cause more than a temporary shock to his niece. To these representations Mr. Maskeleyne replied, that he feared the peril which Miss Hindle had encountered had disturbed her very much. He felt that Mr. Noel had earned a right to express some interest in her recovery, but he trusted that when he did them the honour to call, he should be able to assure him that quiet and change of scene had quite restored her strength.

They had advanced to the gate of the churchyard, and passed through it into the road where the carriage awaited Mr. Maskeleyne, ere Rufus observed within two paces of them Robert Hindle, whom his uncle had met in the village, and who was now handing his cousin Alice into the carriage. Two or three minutes later the uncle and niece drove away, and Rufus Noel and Robert Hindle were left standing alone. They felt that they were rivals. In Robert's mind a deep feeling of stubborn antagonism to Rufus had been slowly but permanently implanted in their career. To this under-current was now added the impulse of his own constant and strong attachment to Alice, which, though it met with

no encouragement from her that could leave him any well-grounded hope that she would ever consent to be his wife, yet gave him such an impression of the truth of her character, and of the genuineness of her friendship, as rather to strengthen the almost hopeless love which he felt for her. He would wait—he would watch. Time and tide might favour him; if not—if some favoured rival were clearly preferred, then he would withdraw himself. He could not endure to witness such a consummation. He had formed his plans, as we shall see, but he would wait until the combination against him appeared to be fatally adverse, ere he carried them into execution. This was the state of mind in which, after the occurrences at the fair, he had again tested his beautiful cousin's disposition, and had received from her the calm confirmation of her friendly regard, but no encouragement to a more ardent feeling. The agitation of Alice immediately after her arrival at home had awakened new doubts in his mind. Was it possible that Rufus Noel was his successful rival in love, as he had been at school? Had he the power to make an impression by his chivalry, grace, and high breeding, which the

steady worth and manly constancy of Robert had failed, without these qualities, to produce? Was there a strange fatality in this constant antagonism of character, station, and claims which their career had hitherto exhibited? Would Rufus rob him of Alice, as he had mastered him in every previous contest?

These feelings had their source in a long train of antecedent circumstances. Robert Hindle had been one of the youths whom, at Sir Hubert's suggestion, the Vicar had received to share the studies of Rufus. The facile capacity of the latter enabled him with ease to surpass the efforts of this little group. But this superiority was contested by Robert Hindle with a sturdy concentration of thought and time, and a dogged obstinacy of effort, which gave early proof of his tenacity of purpose, and of some of the peculiar traits of his character. This rivalry, if not provoked, was constantly sustained by a sense of the difference of the station of Rufus and himself. He belonged to a family of hereditary yeomen in possession of some farms which they had retained through several generations. The wealth of his father and uncle had of late been greatly increased by their commercial

enterprises at Harwood and elsewhere. He felt the ambition to match his capacities against those of the aristocratic race of the Noels as represented by Rufus. Was there anything in their blood, like that of the horse or hound, which gave them the force of a higher and purer breeding? Or could their force—whatever it were—be combated by a Saxon strength of will, and powers of enduring the exhaustion of constant application? He would test to the utmost the relative strength of the two capacities. He had a consciousness that he was possessed of a somewhat coarser nature. His perceptions were less quick—his sensibility less keen—his facility of action far less active and rapid. There were subtle powers possessed by Rufus with which his ruder intellect was not endowed. But might art, the latent force of mass, impelled by an indomitable will, contend with these qualities? His notions were summed up in the comparison familiar to the borders of Yorkshire and Lancashire. ‘Over heavy ground, in a long race, strength may beat breed—bone and muscle may run against blood.’

Rufus, if conscious, gave no outward sign of the rivalry. While his antagonist bent his

whole mind—concentrated his thoughts and time in anxious preparation—and entered with anxiety into the contests in his exercises, or in class before the Vicar, all Rufus did was done with a careless grace, but without the slightest expression of gratification at a superiority which no effort of his rival could surpass—and which he could seldom closely approach.

In their sports, Rufus was chiefly remarkable for singular agility. He was a very rapid runner, and of excellent wind. He could jump standing as high as his chest, and running surmounted barriers as high as his chin. At Mytton, he was trained by a gamekeeper who had been in the army in fencing, single-stick and boxing. He rode well and fearlessly after the hounds—swam with skill. In most of these exercises Robert also became his rival. But even here his muscular strength and powers of endurance were apparently in a great degree compensated by the agility of the light, wiry frame of Rufus, and the remarkable dexterity with which he acquired skill at cricket, at ‘fives,’ or any other game.

Robert’s was a manly nature. But there was nothing to induce friendship between him

and Rufus. Their good qualities rather fitted them for rivalry than confidence. The superiority of Rufus did not provoke envy in Robert, but rather spurred him to exertion, by incentives which only failed to be generous in as far as they partook of antagonism between two natures bred in different ranks of society and endowed with almost opposite qualities. Yet, this constant defeat, notwithstanding all his exertions, could not but cause a deeply-seated disappointment. This broke forth in an incident which occasioned Robert's sudden withdrawal from the school at the request of the Vicar, and gave an indication of some more stubborn and dangerous elements of character than he had hitherto displayed. The two youths were more than sixteen years of age, when, in a contest at football, a quarrel arose between them in one of the ruder struggles, in which Rufus had interfered to protect one of his own party from the strength and hardihood of Robert, who bore upon him at a critical moment with an energy which was even menacing. The rivals came into collision, and in the moment of excitement words, or blows, were exchanged, which issued in a regular fight.



Rufus had been carefully trained, and was a skilful boxer. He was also singularly brave and calm. Robert had much greater strength, but less skill and temper. As soon as Rufus recovered from the transient excitement of the first collision in the game, he found a most formidable antagonist. He stopped the blows of his rival—eluded his attempts to close and throw him—exhausted his strength by provoking and evading his efforts, and when he had thus weakened him, proceeded to punish him ruthlessly by a succession of sharp blows, which told rapidly on his face, and soon made him blind with a mass of contusions. The Vicar considered that the first provocation to this fight had proceeded from Robert Hindle, and having observed the deep-seated antagonism to Rufus which marked his conduct in the school, he had a patient explanation with his father. In this interview he showed the father how the rivalry between the two youths tended in Robert to awaken feelings which might slowly degenerate into an animosity likely to exert a pernicious influence on his character. On Rufus, hitherto, he had not traced any such influence. But the severity of the punishment which he had given

to Robert alarmed the Vicar, lest the hard iron will of his race should thrust itself in his pupil through all the graces and sensibility of youth. In order that this result might be postponed, if not avoided, he felt it necessary to separate the two youths. He therefore pressed upon Mr. Abel Hindle the removal of his son Robert from the school. The father the more readily acquiesced, as the period of his son's education had been prolonged out of deference to the youth's wishes. He was wanted in the business of the firm. The father feared that too much learning might make it more difficult to break in the son to the practical details of manufactures and commerce. Their business was rapidly extending. He therefore thanked the Vicar for the courtesy and consideration evinced in the explanations which he had given him, and withdrew his son. The Vicar took much pains to prevent any breach of good feeling between the youths. He brought them together at his own house at intervals. In the years that had passed, the crisis of their rivalry appeared to be forgotten. During Rufus's College life they met but seldom. The difference of their training made more marked the divergence of their

characters. The manners of Robert hardened and became more abrupt, positive, and self-asserting by his ruder experience of life. Whereas those of Rufus, though they displayed the ardour, self-confidence and sensibility of youth, also, under the refinements of courteous manners, gradually more and more betrayed that this velvet paw concealed the tenacious gripe of his house, of the strength of which he himself was yet unconscious. These were the rivals who were left alone when Mr. Maskeleyne and his niece drove away. They were left, conscious that they had a new point of antagonism. They scowled upon each other, and unable to trust the tumult of feelings which almost choked them, each turned upon a separate path, and walked silently away.

## CHAPTER V.

ON the Vicar's return from his fishing excursion with Rufus, on the Hodder, he found Mr. Hindle awaiting him at the Vicarage. Alice had commissioned her father to deliver personally into the hands of the Vicar the sealed packet which Deacon Spencer had entrusted to her for that purpose. The parcel bore an inscription which gave emphasis to the injunction of the dying man. The Vicar read with surprise and pain these words, written in a clear Italian hand on the envelope:—‘Letters of Lady De la Legh, which will be important to prove that your sister prevented a crime and secured punishment for the evil-doer. Deliver these papers to the Vicar of Whalley—if need be. They are not to pass into the hands of any person who would destroy them or use them to prevent right being done.—KEZIA SPENCER.’

While Mr. Hindle related the circumstances

under which the packet was solemnly confided to his daughter, the Vicar had sunk into a chair apparently awe-stricken.

What could be the meaning of this inscription? Were the documents such as would confirm the invalidity of the marriage of Margaret Forester, or some secret by which it might be established? Such an idea had never entered his imagination. Yet this was suggested by this inscription. It was well that apparently it had been read only by Deacon Spencer, and the mild, unsuspicious, because unworldly, Mr. Hindle.

What if the Vicar declined the charge of the packet? Into whose hands would it then fall? Was it wise even to awaken in Mr. Hindle's mind any notion that it contained documents which could be followed by embarrassment to the family of the Noels?

These thoughts flashed through the Vicar's mind, and muttering that great families were always troubled with claims from crazy people, or designing pretenders, he tossed the packet, apparently carelessly, on to his desk, and at once began enquiries respecting Miss Hindle. Nothing was more easy than to keep the conversation

entirely to this topic, and the simple-minded father arose, after half-an-hour's chat, without any suspicion that the Vicar was suffering from intense anxiety.

To break the seals—to hurry to the light—was the work of an instant when Mr. Hindle was gone. The Vicar found a series of papers neatly folded, docketed with care, numbered and dated, arranged in consecutive order, and tied together with blue ribbon.

They commenced with letters signed *Maria*, and in characters which he recognised as the handwriting of the Dowager Countess De la Legh. She wanted a young girl, with handsome features, good figure, robust health, not more than twelve years old, of a humble but decent working-man's family, whom she could educate and train to become hereafter a confidential attendant. These letters were addressed to the former Vicar of Whalley. They resulted apparently in the selection of Kezia Spencer, to whose father the letters had been given for his satisfaction before he gave up his daughter, even to this apparent good fortune.

Then followed letters from the Countess to Kezia Spencer, at her boarding-school, direct-

ing her studies, work, and amusements, and enjoining on her the things in which peculiar excellence was expected at her hands. The conceptions of the Countess of what her attendant ought to know, and what she should be skilled to do, were full of sagacity, but were founded on the idea of making her maid a confidante and companion, and attaching her to herself by every tie of gratitude and devotion. These letters extended over five years.

To these succeeded, at irregular intervals, scraps of notes, written, sometimes when absent from home, sometimes consisting of instructions left for her attendant, probably to be found in her boudoir. All these disclosed a life of luxury, excitement, ambition, and the ordinary pursuits of the highest circles of society.

The intervals between the dates of the letters were greater, but their contents were more important. Kezia Spencer appeared to have become the companion and confidante of the Countess in her political intrigues. For there were allusions to '*petits soupers*' at which Kezia assisted, and where the secretaries of embassies and other political personages were guests. Strong and urgent suggestions were

given her to require information on certain specified points from M. de —, or Signor —, on pain of their being punished by her disfavour. She was counselled to bear herself even with arrogance, and make her beauty, wit, and talent of service to the State.

Then came one long remarkable letter. It warned her that she was allowing herself to become the victim of her own heart. A woman who would rule must have more head than heart. She must keep her feelings subordinate to the higher claims of her position. These claims must be determined by the intellect. There could be no doubt that the Conte was handsome, accomplished, and amiable; but he was poor—without the strong and eager spirit which alone achieves wealth or political power. He was a graceful, easy, and somewhat dexterous secretary, but not a man to be entrusted with any enterprise requiring secrecy, promptitude, and daring. He was troubled with a conscience. To marry such a man was to determine to be good and humble—for certainly he would fall back into insignificance when unemployed. ‘You will be of no use to me,’ the Countess wrote, ‘if all your admirers and



suppliants find that you are so simple and good as to be in love with an imbecile because he is handsome, constant, and honest.'

There was a long interval between the date of this letter and the next, which was of the most urgent character. We transcribe it verbatim :

'MY DEAR CONTESSA,—All you tell me of your charming little villa at Amalfi, and the English habits and pursuits which you mix with, the do-nothing charms of Italian life will not persuade me that both you and the Conte would not like to visit England if only your banker's account allowed you that costly pleasure. Ah! I am too indulgent, but you always had your own way with me. Dear Kezia, I long to embrace you, and I have no little need of the consolation to be derived from the confidence of an intimate friend. Come, then, to my embrace. I desire so much to fold you in my arms, my child, that I have placed to your credit with the Bank of Naples five hundred pounds.

'When you are here, I will tell you more, but I am torn with the agony of an apprehension that my son is so bewitched by Margaret Forester

that there is danger that in his wilful mood he may marry her. Her! Why, I have loved her as tenderly as I loved you; but, you know, I never could have forgiven you had you allowed your fancy to get enthralled by the heir of the De la Leghs. I hate her, as only my own people can hate, and if you would avert something tragic, be here, dearest, with a speed swifter than those treacherous winds of the Mediterranean!

‘I shall give tone and purpose to my thoughts by confiding them to you. Perhaps I may need your restraint. Perhaps I may need your help. I cannot foresee. All that I know is that I will prevent or defeat this project of marriage. It shall not be! Therefore come, as fast as horses can bring you, to your loving friend,—MARIA DE LA LEGH.’

Apparently the Conte Rufolo was absent in Naples when this letter arrived at Amalfi, and it had been sent to him, for the letter which followed was dated from Naples. It was in these words :—

‘MY DEAREST,—The Countess appears never to have discovered the disgust with which we

were both filled by her reckless attempts to make you a sacrifice for her own ends, which your inexperience might have facilitated if you had not been as pure as you were beautiful. Her own acts recoil upon her. She invites us to London to be the confidants of her intrigues—us, to whom no revenge for her perfidious attempts to separate us would be sweeter than to defeat similar intrigues against other lovers whose happiness might be the sport of her ambition. We will go. We may thus work a righteous retribution. I could, however, only persuade myself to undertake this task by the conviction that her son had chosen a virtuous woman, fitted to adorn his station, and make his life happy. If Margaret Forester be, as you say, beautiful, pure, accomplished, and graceful, why should he not marry her? And why should not we try to defeat any treacherous scheme which might succeed if we refused our aid? I will not accept the money. Owing to our economies, we can afford the journey. Write, therefore, so as to disarm suspicion, but say that we do not need help to enable us to accept the invitation to visit London.—Your ever loving husband, ALFONSO.'

There was a letter of two days' later date from Conte Rufolo, to his wife :

‘MY DEAREST,—Your letter betrays emotion. The remembrance of the perfidy of the plot which the Countess laid against your honour and happiness agitates you. We men sometimes give way to these feminine emotions. As it was my privilege to save you from that catastrophe, so now, dearest, let me warn you against yourself. No tigress is more fierce than a woman in her revenge. We go to prevent—not to inflict evil. I cannot make myself an executioner. You shall not, my dearest wife, have on your conscience the trouble of any human heart. Let the ruthless ambition of this woman inflict no evil on her son. So far I repress the thought of vengeance. That is not for us. Yet I cannot but fear that, without my restraint, your feminine sensibility would see and seize the means to provide for the Countess a terrible reckoning.—Your loving husband,

‘ALFONSO.’

Then followed several notes giving proof of constant social intercourse between the Countess

De la Legh and Conte Rufolo and his wife. In these notes there was no indication of the purpose of the visit to London.

Here the series of letters closed. They were succeeded by a memorandum written in the same Italian hand as the inscription on the envelope:—

‘My husband, the Conte Rufolo, died in London suddenly, at a strange crisis in the history of the family of De la Legh. I was left without a guide—racked with the suspicion of a horrible crime—beside myself with grief—and driven by a remembrance of former treachery, and the knowledge of an intended perfidy, to an intense state of feeling, which prompted me to become the instrument of a terrible revenge. I still hold all the clues to unravel a mystery. The time will come when the harvest of my vengeance will be ripe. I shall have the courage to reap it. If, however, there be need of a solution of this mystery before I intervene, let the Vicar of Whalley insert an advertisement on many successive days in the ————, requesting Kezia Spencer to communicate with him.’

The Vicar had read these manuscripts with astonishment and increasing perplexity. What was the secret? What was the revenge? Why was time required to ripen the harvest of vengeance? All he knew was, that the Dowager Countess by a strange fraud had contrived to cheat her son by a false marriage with Margaret Forester, and that the instrument of this wicked plot had avowed his complicity.

He feared to act without further knowledge. Yet whom could he consult? The brother of Kezia Spencer had certainly never heard of her marriage. According to common repute she had become an actress, or public singer, under an assumed name. Rumour had dealt wildly with her reputation. Her brother's family heard from her only at rare intervals, and then only as recipients of her bounty, or of means to provide for John Spencer. The mother was presumed to be the mistress of some man of rank.

## CHAPTER VI.

BEFORE Mr. Hindle had carried his daughter to Ribchester he had felt the growth of infirmities which he had concealed from her, but on which he had, from time to time, consulted his medical adviser. His counsel had been that his patient should become an inactive partner in the firm of his brothers, and make final arrangements of his property for his daughter's security. All would have been simple could she have encouraged her cousin Robert's addresses, which she had revealed to her father, as well as the kind but neutral state of her own feelings towards him. Mr. Hindle, therefore, warned again by symptoms of his malady, which all anxiety and agitation seemed to evoke, thought his daughter's absence a good opportunity to arrange his affairs through the medium of his nephew, without alarm to her, or unnecessary strain to himself. He had therefore prolonged

her visit to Ribchester. He had frequent interviews with his nephew. He found Robert a zealous guardian of his uncle's and cousin's interests, difficult to move from the settled purpose of making the best of his uncle's position. He made a strange request when his uncle asked him to be his trustee. He consented, provided the Vicar of Whalley now, and John Spencer, when of age, were associated with him. As to John Spencer, he said that he had observed his absolute devotion of gratitude and reverence to Alice. Mr. Hindle consented, conditionally on the approval of Robert and the Vicar when John Spencer was of age. These interviews had brought Robert almost daily to Harwood Cliff during the last fortnight. Among other matters discussed was, however, one critical arrangement for which it was indispensable to provide. The business consisted of three branches—the manufacture of cotton goods, also of mixed fabrics of cotton and woollen, or of linen and woollen, and the printing and dyeing them, as well as flannels and baizes.

Among other enterprises, a younger brother of Robert had been sent out as a colonist to



New South Wales with a stock of merino and Southdown sheep, and means to purchase land and employ labour there. He had been energetic and successful. A new branch of business was gradually growing up, requiring agents in Rochdale, and in some of the West Riding towns. The importation of wool from Sydney annually augmented. The capital grew from year to year. New subordinates for packing, carrying, and shipping the wool were engaged, and importations of tallow and hides and leather grew unexpectedly into being. Besides these, profits had been invested in land in the suburbs of Sydney, the sheep runs had been extended, more convict labour employed, and a choice of junior partners in the colony had become a pressing necessity. Thus that which had been regarded as a mere offshoot of the home manufacture was becoming a large enterprise, the annual increase from which was great, and grew rapidly, while the capital assumed proportions from which the gentle and unambitious mind of Mr. Hindle had shrunk. His peaceful life with his daughter fulfilled all his wishes. When the secret warnings came, he felt he

must retire from all anxious engagements. These warnings had preceded his daughter's indisposition, but were renewed by it. They first seemed to be awakened by the news that his nephew, at their chief station, Doonabarra, in New South Wales, was suffering from pulmonary consumption. It became necessary that some one should go out. The question who should undertake this duty had been privately in discussion for a month before Harwood Fair. It was the secret motive for the final appeal which Robert had made to his cousin. She had assured him of her friendship. But she had finally refused him her love. He had witnessed something that day on which he thought much and long. During the succeeding fortnight he had made great progress in the arrangement of his uncle's affairs to his entire satisfaction. The draft of the settlement was given to the lawyer as the basis of a deed between his father and his two uncles, and for a last will and testament from Alice's father. He knew that his brother, unmarried and struggling with a fatal disease, had made him his heir, and urged his early presence in the colony. He saw there a mine of wealth, if worked with

energy and tenacity. He wrote to his brother to assure him of his early arrival, and delivered his uncle's instructions to the lawyer.

This act of piety and love fulfilled, he had walked from Whalley in a thoughtful mood to Mytton, and there a rude jar to his feelings occurred in an encounter with Mr. Maskeleyne, whom, from an opposition of character, he despised as a half-crazed poetaster and shallow dilettante.

He had been slowly resolving to offer to the firm to become their Australian representative. He could not endure to see Alice the wife of another. He expected that even a few months spent at Sydney and Doonabarra would enable him to organize the enterprise in the colony on such a basis that, confiding it to the ablest and most trustworthy of the managers as junior partners, he could return again to England. Would Alice, in the meantime, marry? Or would she find him changed into one whom she could love? These had been his thoughts on his walk to Mytton, when, to his dismay, having consented to take charge for a moment of Mr. Maskeleyne's conveyance, he came unwarned face to face with Rufus Noel and his cousin

Alice, both wearing the traces of emotion, both disturbed that he should be a witness of this emotion; and Rufus, with a frown of defiance on his brow, as he stood confronting him after Alice had driven away.

He left Mytton ill at ease. He had heard vague rumours of Miss Girdlestone's fate. He knew Margaret Forester's history. He saw that Alice was in the worst hands with her weak uncle Maskeleyne. A glance told him all the dangers of a passionate love from such a man as Rufus Noel. Had he already by his genius and bearing fascinated her? He feared it. He spent a sleepless night. What to do? How could a rival remonstrate? He dared not utter a word to disturb his uncle. *That*, he was privately warned by the surgeon, might be at any time fatal! But to preserve his peace, to save Alice, to restrain Noel, what could be done? He had been Rufus's rival through life. That the Vicar knew. How could he, a rejected suitor, honourably warn the Vicar or the father? His path seemed to be hedged with thorns. He would watch. Opportunity would arise. He would reflect. With patience and thought means would be found,

perhaps, to warn Alice, to spare her father alarm and anguish. It was clear that for the present his duties were at home. He therefore suggested to his uncle a temporary arrangement of the Australian difficulty, and offered privately, if no other selection soon occurred, to visit the colony himself. This narration accounts for the attitude of Robert Hindle during the succeeding fortnight.

A note was left at his father's house one night, written in a most elegant hand, seldom or never now seen, but like that of the most perfect ancient MS., the work of the monks in the Scriptorium of an Abbey:—‘What are you about, Robert Hindle? Where is your love for your cousin? Will you allow this Noel to dig a grave for her as his cousin did for Lucy Girdlestone? Or will you allow the Corsican grandmother to ruin her, as she sacrificed your friend and well-wisher, *Margaret?*’

He knew whence the note came. It was to him like a spell. He stole at night to the *Owlets' Hole*. There he heard of Rufus's rambles on the Ribble, and of the possibility of meetings. In some way the solitary lady seemed to be omnipresent. She knew more

than he of what were Maskeleyne's habits, and what the risks of interviews between Rufus and his niece.

Horror of the fate which awaited his cousin, if she should be fascinated by Rufus, mastered his whole spirit. He resolved upon the course to be pursued. He would devote himself to the protection of Alice.

With the stealthiness of an American Indian he personally watched Mytton Hall. For this purpose he left his father's house in Whalley before break of day, and, traversing the fields, hid himself in a thicket of the opposite bank, whence he could observe all that passed. Rufus, with the first gleams of light, left the Hall with fishing-tackle, attended by his foster-brother. He fished down the Ribble for some miles, and then, leaving his attendant, pursued his way alone to Ribchester, sketch-book in hand. Through his whole course Robert watched, stealing on the opposite bank, concealed by hedges and coppice, and gaining headland after headland, whence he could overlook his rival's path. Arrived at Ribchester, Rufus had reconnoitred the Parsonage from the opposite bank. It was pleasantly situated in a clump of beech

and sycamore on a knoll near the Ribble—a modest mansion with a small garden, in a retired position. Here Rufus remained till noon. Then he returned to the bridge, crossed it, and advanced to call at the Parsonage. He was admitted. Robert desired to get a near view of his features as he retired. He crept to a cottage near the gate; asked for some milk and a seat by the fire; liberally rewarded the mistress of the poor dwelling, and sat like a foot-traveller, eating his sandwich behind a print curtain at the window. Rufus was apparently taking luncheon with Mr. Maskeleyne. One—two—three hours passed away. When he came forth, Mr. Maskeleyne accompanied him to the gate. Rufus was very pale. There was an expression of defeat and despair in his face. Mr. Maskeleyne was apparently offering consolation, of which Rufus seemed to be quite unconscious. There was no mistaking the phenomenon. In whatever way—on whatever ground—Alice had been true to herself. She must have declared—not—not—he feared that she was indifferent—but his instincts told him that Rufus's addresses, unauthorised, unknown, were such as she could not receive. A maiden

of another station — of another faith — she could not be the wife of the possible heir of an earldom—the certain heir of a baronetcy and great landed property. She was mistress of her own thoughts. She was the guardian of her own conscience. She would spare her father the pain and agitation of the disclosure. But she had given her reply. Such was Robert's interpretation of the mien with which Rufus left the Parsonage, and of Mr. Maskeleyne's obsequious and obtrusive consolations. He kept his station till it was dusk, pleading fatigue to his hostess; but observing no other sign in the Parsonage, he at length quitted the cottage, and rapidly crossing the bridge, returned by a private field road along the left bank of the Calder to Whalley. That was his first day's observation. Wearied, dispirited, and alarmed, he pleaded illness, went to bed, and before dawn was again on foot, varying his station, lest he should attract attention, to the other bank of the Ribble, and to a dense thicket of bramble in the wood on a high bluff called Bendwood Cliff. It was well he did so. Rufus, with gun and dogs, attended by his keeper, scoured the Mytton bank. Whether it were a vague suspicion



or not, Robert fancied they searched the wood. Had he been there a personal encounter would have been inevitable, for the dogs explored every bush. Then from the opposite bank he saw Rufus draw forth a telescope, and, waiting for light, search the Bendwood—the plantations, and banks. Here was abundant reason for circumspection. To-day, also, his path, after the meeting of the Calder and Ribble, would be peculiarly open to observation. He therefore saw the necessity of making a circuit to gain the high promontory between the two rivers as a point of observation. That accomplished, he proposed to make another wide circuit, and, by dint of great exertion, reach Salmesbury Hall, and conceal himself there in some outhouse, if he saw no reason to avail himself of the covert in the woods west of Hacking Hall. Accordingly, as soon as Rufus and his keeper were out of sight, he plunged down the hill, and behind hedgerows and coppice, and gained a thicket in the wood between the meeting of the two rivers. On his arrival there was no trace of his game. The voice of the dogs was not heard. Warned by his first day's experience, he had brought a telescope. He

searched the landscape in every direction, and could discover nothing. He came to the conclusion that Rufus, to baffle observation and conjecture, had pursued his sport up the flank of Longridge, above the manor of Bailey. A discharge of guns on the hill near Stoneyhurst confirmed this conclusion. The design, therefore, obviously was to approach Ribchester from the hill, or even from the west. This could now be ascertained only from a station near the Parsonage. Without diminishing his precautions, he waded through the Calder, made his intended circuit, and reached Salmesbury Hall before noon.

There he crept into a penthouse for calves, and behind a hurdle, within the bars of which furze was entwined to keep the weather out, he sat on a bundle of straw, and thrusting his telescope through an opening, watched in silence the Parsonage and swept the landscape with his glass. About eleven o'clock, Mr. Maskeleyne issued forth with his botanical box strapped over his shoulder. He struck into a lane which led straight to the flank of Longridge. Robert caught sight of him at intervals, and traced him step by step. Arrived

at a distance of about two miles from Ribchester, he left the lane, crossed the fields, and made directly for an open quarry high on the hill-side. Robert comprehended his destination. He searched the neighbourhood of the quarry. There was no sign of any expectant there. Yet Mr. Maskeleyne went straight to his mark, never stopping to pick a flower, and entered the quarry. On this place Robert concentrated his observation. An hour elapsed. At the close of this time two persons emerged. One was Mr. Maskeleyne. The other was Rufus. They stood for a few minutes talking at the mouth of the excavation. Then Mr. Maskeleyne rapidly descended; Rufus turned back into the quarry for a time, but in a quarter of an hour he also emerged, and took a path leading directly along the side of the hill in the direction of Mytton at a rapid pace. Robert was satisfied that he was on his way home. But he wished to witness Mr. Maskeleyne's return, and he therefore kept his position. He took a little refreshment behind his screen, and when he again applied his eye to the glass and directed it to the Parsonage, he was startled to see his cousin Alice walking alone in the

garden on the terrace above the river. She had evidently stepped out of the drawing-room through the window. Her bust was wrapped in a shawl, but her ample folds of hair were the only covering to her head. Her noble and graceful figure was draped in a simple dress. She seemed quite calm. Was she awaiting her uncle's return? Apparently she was. By-and-by Mr. Maskeleyne, after his walk of seven miles, somewhat weary, entered the garden gate. He approached her on the terrace, and gave her a letter. She broke the seal before him where she stood—read the letter, which seemed to be held steadily, though the wind might make it flutter. Read, she folded it again, and spoke to her uncle. Then they paced about the garden—to and fro—till the luncheon bell rang. At that summons they disappeared. Robert comprehended the position of affairs. He resolved on a nearer view. He had for this purpose possessed himself of a letter from her father. He crossed the bridge, walked boldly to the house, and in twenty minutes was seated at table with his cousin and Mr. Maskeleyne, having given her Mr. Hindle's letter as the motive for his

intrusion. Alice received him very kindly. She had a sincere confidence in her cousin Robert. A great respect for the manly strength and straightforward honesty of his character. Gratitude for his protection of her father. A woman's appreciation of a love which she could not return in kind, but could regard with a grateful respect. Of all this Robert had enjoyed abundant proofs. Alice enquired much about her father. Remonstrated, that, as she was well, her father should come and bring her home. Her aunt, though fatigued on that day, no longer needed her help. Robert said he would carry a letter to her father; but he concealed his infirmities, and he foresaw that, until the will and deed were settled, Mr. Hindle would not bring his daughter home. She was anxious, too, about John Spencer. What had become of John? Who taught him now? Had he been to Harwood Cliff. Where was he? Where was his aunt? Robert did not know. He promised to enquire. If possible, he would send John to visit her at Ribchester, if she did not at once return home. That seemed to satisfy her as to her disciple John Spencer. Then the

household. Old Tabitha the cook—how was Tib? Robert could say that Tib looked, as ever, sturdy, faithful, slow, and apparently stolid, but observant as a watchdog of all that concerned her master's interests and well-being. And Ellen, her maid? She, Robert thought, was like a caged bird. Restless, fluttering, impatient, wondering what had become of everybody—where was her mistress—where?——‘Aye, said Alice, ‘where is John? What has become of him? Well she may, if he has never been at the Cliff since his uncle's death! Really, cousin Robert, I never knew I was of any importance in this world till I proved that my little wheel is wanted in the family clock at Harwood Cliff. I am a dutiful girl, I hope, cousin, but say to my father that uncle Maskeleyne shall take me home unless he come for me soon.’

He was satisfied. She seemed self-possessed. Her hopes and sympathies were with her home. She had not been dazzled by the offer of a higher station. She had, within, a power to repress the suggestions of a natural impulse towards a lover like Rufus. But half-an-hour had elapsed since he had seen her receive and

read Rufus's letter. Yet here she was, calm in her resolution of high principle and maidenly reserve. Why should he ever have doubted? Why should he play the spy on one so capable of protecting herself? He turned to Mr. Maskeleyne, who had seemed absorbed in thought while he slowly ate his luncheon, and a glance told him that he was justified in watching the weakness of her guardian, and preserving her by his own protection from snares of which this man's vanity and romantic fancy might make him the victim. He therefore determined to sift Mr. Maskeleyne. His cousin Alice left the room to visit her aunt, and then Robert opened fire on him, '*Mr. Maskeleyne.*' An abrupt assault seemed likely to throw him off his guard.

'I caught sight of you as you walked from the Longridge Quarry.'

'You caught sight of me'—stammered Mr. Maskeleyne. 'Where were you?'

'Where I could observe you very well. Who was that who stood with you in the entrance of the Quarry?'

'Did you see anyone there?'

'Of course I did.'

'Then you must have seen who it was.'

‘Sir, you would have at once told me, if your meeting had been accidental.’

‘What do you mean by this insinuation, sir?’

‘I mean that, having encountered you with Rufus Noel at Mytton, I want to know what was the object of your assignation with him in Longridge Quarry?’

‘You are very abrupt, sir.’

‘I am very straightforward. I have a right, as my cousin’s future guardian, if her father dies, to ask you, had that assignation anything to do with your consent to convey to my cousin Alice a letter from him?’

‘Really, Mr. Robert Hindle, I am at a loss to conceive what grounds you have for such a suspicion.’

‘If I had no other, Mr. Maskeleyne, your inability to give a direct reply to my enquiries would be enough. I tell you—you may think it a piece of necromancy if you will—but you have consented to take on you the honourable office of betraying your niece to the persecution of addresses from a man whom she can never marry. You have brought her a letter from him to-day.’



Maskeleyne looked aghast. 'I deny that I have in any way been unfaithful to my duty to my niece.'

'Rather say, sir, that you did not foresee the inevitable consequences of your actions.'

Robert spoke this in a searching whisper, and Maskeleyne's face became very pale, while Robert, seeing that he was unable to reply, and knowing his superstitious weakness, went on:—

'You are warned—henceforth know that your actions are all observed. Wherever you are, my eye is upon you as it was to-day! You cannot evade me! I follow you, unseen, close as your shadow! Have I proved it to you? In fact, I saw you accompany Rufus Noel yesterday to your garden gate. To-day, I saw you with him in Longridge Quarry. You have entered into an engagement to meet him to-morrow. Keep your engagement, in order to carry back my cousin's dismissal of his impossible pretensions. Look at your shadow as you walk, and remember that I am as near, though unseen.'

Maskeleyne, who had risen in amazement, sank down into his chair self-convicted and troubled.

‘My cousin will soon return. If you do not wish her to see your confusion, had you not better retire to your study?’

Mr. Maskeleyne was too glad to avail himself of the suggestion, and, without a word, withdrew.

Robert calmly took up a book, and awaited the return of his cousin. In half-an-hour she opened the door, saying :

‘I hoped you were not gone, Robert, and I am glad we have opportunity for a little quiet talk. I want, dear Robert, very much to return to my father. His years increase—his health is feeble. I am more necessary to him than anyone can know but you, cousin. I have sent repeated messages to my father that I am well. I wonder much he does not take me home.’

‘Alice,’ said Robert, ‘I have something to tell you which I think you will be glad to know. Your father has been arranging his affairs for a more tranquil life. Business, especially since our affairs have become more complicated, harasses him. He wished to complete these arrangements while you were away. The final instructions are given.’

‘Thank God ! My dear, gentle father is not

fit for this rough world. I am much relieved by this. It surely will prolong his life to me.'

'And I, Alice,' said Robert, 'have to ask you a question. Have you any objection that I, who have thrice offered you my love, but above all other things, next to your love as my wedded wife, prize your friendship—have you any objection that I should be named as your guardian in your father's will, with John Spencer and the Vicar of Whalley?'

'Who could be more fit for such a trust than you?' said Alice, holding out her hand. 'There is a manliness, Robert, in your help to my dear father, and your protection of his daughter, which perhaps ought to win my love. But love is not ours to give.'

'I know it, Alice. I am grateful—unspeakably grateful that you permit me to be your guardian.'

'No man could I prefer,' said Alice.

'Then, dear cousin, may I anticipate my office? I want to utter to you a word of warning.'

'As how, Robert?' she replied, with evident distress.

'Your uncle Maskeleyne is weak in judg-

ment. His weakness is swayed by a romantic fancy not controlled by strong principles. Distrust him utterly. He is incapable of giving you wise counsel. Trust only to prayer—to your own purity and elevation—to your love for your home and your father—to your memory of your sainted mother! I have done, dear Alice, my first blunt essay, in anticipation of my dignity of guardian over you, who—for the last time, dearest cousin, I say it—have been the idol of all my dreams!’

‘You have a noble heart, dear Robert, to forgive me and to love me still. My guardian, as I will now always call you, you appeal to all my best instincts. I am on my guard. I see my uncle’s feebleness. I am self-reliant. Doubt me not. I will be true to my mother’s last words?’

‘What, dear ward, were they?’

‘She said, “I foresee, dear Alice, great trials before you—trials of your own spirit; temptations, conflicts, repeated till you are bewildered and worn. Remember, my child, in prayer is your refuge. You will have the victory while you can pray. If you forget to pray you are lost!” My guardian, I have prayed, and I thank God I have the victory so far!’

‘That is a panoply of mail, cousin. I leave you in the hands of God, but I will be a vigilant guardian.’

He raised her hand to his lips. ‘Nay,’ she said, ‘dear Robert,’ offering her cheek, ‘we are brother and sister. We will not change.’

‘Farewell, dear ward,’ he said.

‘Farewell, dear guardian,’ she replied.

Robert Hindle walked into the open air considerably reassured. He had succeeded beyond his most sanguine hopes in penetrating the exact state of Rufus’s impulsive addresses to his cousin. He knew how to estimate his character. He had been carried captive by the beauty, grace, and purity of Alice. His passion had overlooked all obstacles. He had determined, at whatever cost, to make her his wife. His suit, however, was clandestine, and was pursued furtively, and by covert means, such as would have been more appropriate to a less honourable purpose. The youth and inexperience of Alice were tried by a severe test, but she was guarded as by angels—by the memory of her mother, by her love for her father and her home, and by her own religious elevation of character. Then he had terrified her weak and

superstitious uncle, who would have exposed her to needless trials. What remained to be done? He had reached the bridge on the Ribble. He leaned upon the battlement in deep thought. Could he strike Maskeleyne with another stunning blow, so as to rivet his superstitious fears? Rufus had nerves of steel, a courage which danger exalted, a presence of mind to affront death in the breach alone. But he was singularly sensitive to dishonour. He had no right to dismiss his gamekeeper, to steal like a thief to a quarry, to carry on a correspondence with a beautiful and inexperienced girl unknown to her father, to practise on the vanity and romantic folly of Maskeleyne, making him his instrument in addresses to a maiden below his station, and with whom marriage was encumbered with innumerable difficulties. He must be taught that his path was tortuous, questionable, and even, as far as it was clandestine, discreditable. He must feel the humiliation of a possible exposure to his father and family, and to the whole country, of what would appear a dishonourable attempt to corrupt a charming maiden of the middle class, Robert pondered for some time. There would be still

an hour of light. Making a circuit he struck for the hill through coppice and bye-paths. He reached the quarry, made his observations, and then walking swiftly towards Mytton along the flank of the hill, an hour after sunset entered a lonely farmhouse in a clump of sycamores, on the slope of Longridge.

The farmer was a man with a great square body on long shanks, nearly seventy, but hale and strong. Age betrayed itself in the withering of his stalwart legs, and the yielding of his knees under the weight of his huge frame. His shoulders, too, were rounded, and his long neck bent forward with a head covered with grizzled hair. The weather-beaten face was marked with strong lines of endurance and hardihood. The eyes, twinkling with shrewdness, and gleaming now and then with resolution, betokened a character energetic in its limited sphere of action. He had been at least six feet four inches high. He welcomed Robert with a grasp which would have crushed the bones of a more delicate hand.

Besides this giant, three sons, each at least six feet high, in the vigour of manhood, sat with their father at a deal table, eating their

evening meal of oatmeal porridge from a common central bowl, but dipping every spoonful into a separate porringer of new milk appropriated to each brother. All rose on the entrance of Robert, but he soon persuaded them to be seated, while he paid his respects to the dame, who bustled about the flagged floor attending to the wants of her sons and husband. Robert accepted a bowl of milk and some oatcake, and sat at the table in familiar conversation with the father and his sons.

The Whitakers were of a family of yeomen and farmers extensively ramified along the flanks of Pendle, and in the valleys of the Ribble and Calder. This branch was a race of magnificent stature and proportions, and with fair Saxon faces, full of courage and vigour. They tended their farm, partly a milk and partly a stock and sheep farm : they wove, in the intervals of field-work and in winter, the warp and weft spun by their mother and sisters ; they kept the game of the Manor for a young manufacturer of Preston, who held it under Lord Salmesbury, whose tenant their father was. They were known to Robert Hindle



because they brought the produce of their looms to the firm at Harwood, who took all the cloth woven by the family. He was, therefore, familiar with all the giants. They knew his manly, simple character. There was a mutual confidence of good faith, proved in the intercourse of business. They were indebted to him for acts of liberality. The firm of Hindles were their bankers, who received their surplus funds after fairs and harvest. When money was wanted for rent or stock, a loan, if needed, was always ungrudgingly made. At the moment, the septuagenarian giant was indebted about two hundred pounds to the Hindles for a large flock of sheep which he had purchased at Harwood Fair.

‘Hae gooas toimes (How are trade and business getting on?) Meaustur Robert?’ enquired the father.

‘Very well indeed, my old friend,’ said Robert. ‘Money is very plentiful, and we keep up our trade in spite of the war, except only the weaving, which is dull.’

‘That’s weel. Ye can let me keep o’ th’ wrang soide o’ my ’ceawnt (on the wrong side of the ledger) nur (until) oi’n turned yon

flock into wool and butcher's mate, and then into brass (money).'

'Whenever you want money, Abraham, I will lend you the whole value of your farming stock, on your simple word as a Lancashire man of the old breed.'

'Beloike Meaustur Robert's o'th' owd breed hissel,' said a young Anak. 'These Hindles o' Harrod Cliff han bin theer, folk sayn, toime eawt o' moind.'

'I'm thoroughbred Lancashire, Reuben, without a cross for ten generations, if the parish register at Whalley speak truly; and when I talk with one of the old stock, like your father, a nod or a wink is as good as a bond.'

'Bonds befar! Bonds is for rogues; bonds is 'tornies' gins (attornies' traps) to catch fees an' snare chaps wi' words (ensnare people with words). Divil a poacher i' this Manor has tricks as fause (cunning) as them 'tornies.'

'By the mon, vara weel thowt on (well remembered). Weer's yon letter fro' Preston?' said another Anak. 'Show it t' Meaustur. He'll ha moor gumption on it nur uz.' (He'll have more understanding of it than we shall.)

'Yore reet, Benjamin,' said the father.

‘Mèaustur Robert, moi lads have to tent t’ game (keep the game) for an undertakker (a tenant) who lives at Preston. He’s a fearfu’ de-al moor partiklar nur Lord Salmesbury. W’en nowt bur plague. Nae, here’s t’ letter. He says a clerk fro’ Preston Bank seed a chap poaching on t’ manor other to-day or a day sin’. He shot pheasants, an’ partridge, an’ hares along t’ ridge. He flights (scolds) my lads beawt stint (without measure) for noan tenting (keeping) weel. We were off at Slaidburn yestern, and to-day we were at Clitheroe market. Ill news floies quick, yo seen. What mun he do, bur he sends a chap straight fro’ Preston on a grey gelding, just at sun deawn (sunset), to drop this letter. Moi lads is o’ ov a fluster.’ (My sons are quite disturbed.)

Robert understood the matter at once. Rufus, leaving his gamekeeper, had pursued his game along the Ridge, and unwittingly trespassed on a neighbouring manor, filling his game-bag freely as he advanced. Robert saw his opportunity and seized it. He would at once place Rufus in a position merited by his furtive conduct, and which would be the immediate consequence of it.

‘Let me see the letter,’ he said. ‘Ah! here is a very careful description of the intruder. No gamekeeper. A tall slender young man of about one-and-twenty; a handsome shooting dress, velvet, leathern leggings, double-barrelled gun, and velvet hunting-cap, dark hair and eyebrows, very skilful shot, very active. You cannot fail to know him if he comes again. He is bound to show his certificate. If he do not, ask him to go with you to Squire Leycester, at Browsholme, and explain who he is.’

‘That’s the gate’ (the way), exclaimed all the giants.

‘Now,’ said Robert, ‘lend me your spring-cart, Whitaker, and I’ll be back here before daylight, and help your lads in this matter.’

‘There’s nowt like a cool yead (head) sich as yorn’ (yours), said the father. ‘We’n be mich obleeged an youn (if you will) stan’ boi us (stand by us) i’ this pinch, Meaustur Robert.’

‘I’ll do so on one condition,’ said Robert; ‘that your sons keep my counsel, and none of you say that you have seen me here.’

‘Reckon on us when owt (anything) is to be snug,’ said all the Anaks.

In a few minutes Robert mounted the spring-

cart alone. He told Reuben to expect his return before daylight, and to sit up for him, and then disappeared. Reuben wrapped himself in his maud, and, bringing in two or three bundles of straw from the barn, stretched himself upon them, when his brothers and father, at their usual early hour, disappeared. About four o'clock there was a tap at the window. As that failed to awaken the slumbering giant, there came a heavy blow on the door. Reuben arose, collected his thoughts, and, stretching his gigantic frame, opened the door, and Robert Hindle entered. Reuben observed that the horse had been driven fast and far. It was trembling with fatigue. Its head also was towards the east. The observant gamekeeper therefore conceived that, though Robert had left for the eastern side of the country, he had returned from the western. He asked no questions, but took the horse to the stable, and returned to put before his patron a bottle of whisky left out by his father, and oatcake and bread. Then he returned to take care of his horse, and Robert, who seemed to need refreshment, poured out the whisky and consumed the bread, and, by-and-by, fell asleep in the huge oaken chair by the fire.

Robert's sleep was disturbed by the gathering of the family in the 'house-place,' as the kitchen is called. They were astir before day-break, and Abraham, the father, lit his pipe at the fire, and sat down while his sons went out to the farm-work, and his wife and daughters bustled about the house and dairy.

'You have a chamber, old friend, on the west gable, where I once slept after a day's shooting in the Manor?'

'Oh, yoi (Oh, yes), we caun (call) it t' lord's room, 'cause my lord, when he wur a lad, used fur to keep yon (live there)—eh, a weary toime back, when he wur here wi' his guns an' dogs.'

'Will you let me have a fire there, Abraham?'

'Wi' o t' pleasure i' loife! See here, wench; clap a foire i' t' lord's room i' no toime. Oppen t' windys, mak' it snod (clean) an' tidy. Meaustur Robert, win yo' mak' yore breakfast yon?'

'No, thank you, Abraham; but when your lads have done the farm-work—milked the beasts, groomed and fed the horses, and cleaned out the yard and shippons, I will get them to put on their keepers' coats and leggings, and we'll have a chat up in the lord's room.'

‘Nowt loike it (puff). Nowt loike a regulur plon (puff). Cool an’ steady (puff). Young folks’ blood is hot (puff), but wi’ a plon (puff) blunders is missed (puff). Nowt loike it (puff). Think, mon, an’ do’t (puff). That’s gradely gate (puff). Betty, wench (puff); Betty, my wench (puff). My pipe’s eawt,’ said he, knocking the ashes from the bowl; ‘oi wonder woi Betty is noan fur bringin’ moi seawr milk’ (buttermilk).

At this moment his wife brought him a great bowl of buttermilk and a hunch of bread. Both the bread and the milk disappeared in the briefest space of time, and then Abraham raised his bulk and stalked out of the house, according to custom, to look after the farming-work—to examine the kine before they went a-field, to see his horses, and to give hints to his sons. To-day these hints were limited to the repetition of Robert’s wishes.

By-and-by the three young giants and their father came in from the yard. They washed themselves in an outhouse, flung off their wooden clogs, put on their laced keepers’ high-lows and leathern leggings. Then, with green shooting-coats and waistcoats with metal buttons, they came to the deal table in the middle

of which the mother put a huge bowl of oatmeal porridge, and before each stalwart son a great basin of warm new milk, with a hunch of bread at its side. The father and the sons fell to vigorously, and the viands disappeared in silence.

Meanwhile one of the daughters had brought a round table to Robert's side, and on this she placed a tray with tea and coffee, toast, eggs, butter, and rashers of bacon—a delicate attention to his wants of which he was very well disposed to avail himself after his midnight raid.

When breakfast was over, Abraham and his sons accompanied Robert to the lord's room, where they had a long conference, and he explained to them his plans.

The room was well placed for this object in the gable of the house. One window to the south looked down the slope to the Ribble. Another to the west commanded the flank of the hill to Ribchester and to the Ridge. That to the north was a watch-tower for the slope above the farmhouse, and backwards towards Stoneyhurst.

'Leave your guns behind,' Robert said, 'lest hot blood lead to mischief; for you will find



this gentleman can show fight. Take each your blackthorn, but leave these collies with me. They look quiet and sleek, but they are cunning and cruel. Don't unchain the mastiff, lest he get scent of the fray. Keep your tempers, my lads; you are three to one, and you surely can catch and hold one man, after a little tussle. However, I warn you he is not like a common poacher. He will lead you a dance before you can hold him.'

'Aye, aye,' said the father. 'Meaustur Robert's reet; tak' tent there's no misfortins. A brokken bone or so mays no 'ceawnt (counts for nothing). Bur tak' tent yo dunnot damage t' young chap's fease (face). Crack noan on his skull. Dunnot be too lungeous (savage in fight). Oi'n known mishaps when t' blood's up, as han lasted o (all) t' loife. Yo mun be cool, yo seen: as good-tempered as if yo wern ache on yo a-coortin', an' wanted yore wench to goo a gate, 'at hoo'd rather be coaxed to goo nur driven, dun yo see?'

'Reuben,' said Robert, 'you will meet this young gentleman, and question him. He deserves rather a rough questioning if he kill game again to-day, and have no licence with

him. Your brothers will keep out of sight, close at hand, till wanted. You had better meet him near the eastern boundary of the Manor.'

'O (all) as clear as day-leet,' said Reuben ; oi'll lay howd on him as tenderly as an it were Nancy hersel'. If he wunnot do wi' a hug as would ple-ase Nancy, yo see, boi gum ! oi can hug loike t' bear at Clitheroe wakes, an' if he has ribs, they'n crack o (all) to splithereens (splinters).'

'Oi should gie him ceawnsel not to try Reuben's grip. By th' mon, he threw t' Ribchester blacksmith o'er his yead last fair, as if he'd been a choilt' (child).

'Don't despise your enemy,' said Robert ; 'he has the courage of ten lions. He's as cool as an old general under fire ; he's as active as a colley dog ; and he's as quick as one of those mountebanks that you've seen at the fair. You'll not hold him without some trouble.'

'May be, may be ; but we'n howd him o (all) the same.'

## CHAPTER VII.

AT the Parsonage at Ribchester Alice came to breakfast calm and smiling, but she found her uncle Maskeleyne looking as though he had passed a sleepless night. She knew that he had seen the family surgeon the evening before, and that he had given him a sleeping draught. She was therefore disturbed to see her uncle's worn and agitated look. She did not seem to add to his comfort when she said,

‘Uncle Maskeleyne, my own feeling would have led me to refrain from any reply to Mr. Noel’s proposals. He offers to return to Cambridge—to devote himself to University pursuits as tutor of his college; to await his succession to his independent property when he is twenty-five—if I will give him the hope that I will then become his wife. That is his offer. He pleads that, as his happiness depends on the answer I give him, I cannot refuse him a

reply, especially as you have promised him one. This is what I have written.' She then read the following letter :—

‘SIR,—It does not seem to me that I have even any right to reply to your letter while absent from my father, and without his knowledge, nor should I do so unless it were to relieve my uncle Maskeleyne from an engagement undertaken too easily, and without my sanction. No maiden who has such a sense of what is due to herself as to deserve to become your wife would consent to be sued without your father’s knowledge. Your letter betrays that you have allowed your natural ardour to carry you into a position which he would disapprove and disavow. Retrace your steps. No harm is yet done. In the path of duty and honour you will become calm again. Farewell.

‘ALICE HINDLE.’

‘That is my reply, uncle Maskeleyne. My letter ought to reassure you.’

‘It comforts me much, Alice. Your judgment in the matter is just. This is my last

interview with Mr. Noel. My nerves are too weak to bear further strain. I have spent a sleepless night in anticipation of this morning.'

'I am glad that you approve the letter.'

The calmness and gentleness of Alice restored the wavering balance of Mr. Maskeleyne's mind to something more like equanimity. They talked of other topics. It was a sunny, invigorating, autumnal morning. To cheer her uncle, Alice put on her bonnet, wrapped herself in her shawl, and calling her aunt's maid, walked with him through the village and half a mile on his way to Longridge. Then, thinking him self-possessed, she turned from him, leaving him to pursue his path.

While she had been with him he was tranquil. When she was gone Robert's words recurred: 'Look at your shadow!' The sun was bright. His shadow was projected on the hedge on the western side of the road. As he advanced it mocked his motions. Every step he took the spectre at his side imitated. 'Remember I am as close to you as your shadow.' Where? He looked round on every side with a vague terror. Where was his unseen companion? He stopped at a field

gate, and looked whether anyone had dogged his steps, hidden by the hedge. No. He did not like to see the shadow upright by his side on the hedgerow. He found himself turning to address it, and remonstrate. Were his wits going? He had consented to the betrayal of his niece. Her own sense of maidenly duty to her father had preserved her, not his guardianship. He arrived at the point where he had to diverge from the road to a dingle which led straight to the quarry. It was a relief to look no longer on the upright shadow thrown on the hedgerow. It lay flat on the field. It was a shadow, not a spectre. Moreover, for a space his path lay across the wide pasture. He looked round. Surely no one was near him? How could they be? He smiled at his superstitious terror. Then he entered the dingle. The path ran along the edge of a little brook brawling over the pebbles, among alders, hazel, and willow. He did not like the brawl and tinkle of the brook, nor the southing of the wind in the trees. That gave an advantage to the enemy to approach. Moreover, on every thicket the shadow stood upright like a sentinel. There was a huge mass of

holly, dense as the growth of a hundred years could make it. It grew close to a bold face of rock, over which the brook leaped into a pool at its foot, making a sheer descent in a beautiful sheet of water, broken at its foot with foam, and surrounded by eddies. It was a spot to be haunted by a water-nymph. And surely—what was that?—such a spirit seemed to be there; for a lady, with hair of the most silken softness, and yellow like gold, which fell in wavy tresses on her shoulders—a lady of great beauty stepped from behind the mass of holly which had hidden her. But her eyes glared fiercely, and her voice seemed to hiss as she spoke:—

‘Have you looked at your shadow as you walked along, and watched it mock you? We are close to you always—conscience-stricken, lost man! Give me the letter you have from Alice Hindle. I am a fitter messenger than you to deliver a maiden’s answer to the man who would drag her down to my fate. Give me the letter; and away home!’

He had mechanically given her the letter, and she had turned from him contemptuously to ascend the hill. He meanwhile had staggered

back against the rock in confusion and superstitious dread.

But Margaret quickly climbed the zigzag path, scarcely deigning to cast a glance back upon her prostrated victim. The upland gained, she walked steadily on towards the mouth of the quarry, which she entered deliberately. She reached the amphitheatre of the excavation, and found Rufus Noel seated on a block of stone, his pointer crouched at his feet, and his gun across his knees, awaiting Mr. Maskeleyne. Her approach evidently surprised him. She came slowly forward, and said :

‘Sit down again, Rufus Noel. I come not to you in anger. I have stifled for the time the voice of my own wrongs from your race. You are young ; uncorrupted ; in the first flush of youth ; inexperienced. You have not yet proved the strength of the bow of steel which impels the destiny of the Noels. You are giving way to the same headlong impulse which made your uncle a fatal lover to me. It is not in unkindness, then, that I say none is so fit to bear to you the letter in which Alice Hindle declares your proposals to be such as she cannot listen to. I, Margaret Forester,



the woman who was for five years, to your uncle his wedded wife, bring the letter from the woman who, knowing my history, avoids my fate. There, Rufus Noel, is her letter; read it, and we will then talk calmly about this matter.'

Rufus had gazed on her in silence and in pity, mingled with some wonder and admiration. She watched his features as he read the letter, and then thrust it into a pocket of his vest.

'Well,' she said, 'I suppose you will say that there is nothing there which does not confirm your resolution. You will overcome all difficulties. You will win her father's consent; or you will wait till he is dead. You will not marry. You will baffle her objections by your constancy; you will wear them out by time. Since you cannot take the citadel by assault, you will starve out the garrison. You have resolved to make this maiden your wife. Well, I will draw another picture to you. You love her passionately; that I grant. But have you thought whether you can comprehend your whole destiny in the love of one heart, even though it be of angelic purity and beauty?

Ambition will come: the pride of race; the love of wealth, rank, and station; the thirst for power. The struggle with rivals for place; the idea of dominating the destinies of an empire; of swaying the course of events in Europe. Then, poor heart, where will be the Alice who has been taught to live on the light of your eyes? She will be a part of the pageant that will surround you; a thing of beauty in your palaces. But you will not find time to feed the love of this humble maiden, who has given you her heart—her life—her all.'

Rufus had gazed at her calmly, wondering that a woman of such power, refinement, and penetration should spend her whole life in the work of vigilance and warning.

'Oh! I read you well. Now I tell you this, that you may know that Alice shall be warned, her father put upon his guard. Nay, tempt me not, Rufus. I have some tenderness for you, you are so like what my own Rufus was long ago; but if you tempt me far, I will arouse the devil in Sir Hubert.'

'If you do, Margaret, I will shoot myself.'

'I will not do it then, till I see no other way of escape for Alice. But ere we grapple

with that extremity, let me plead with you, Rufus—I who am not wont to plead—I whose voice ought rather to be a scream of denunciation. I soften my voice—I try to think of you for a moment, as in my madness I once thought of your uncle. Margaret of Pendle pleads, Rufus. Listen attentively to my pleading—it may be the last you will listen to! Spare this little life! Do not by force of will, by stratagem, and all-conquering energy seek to absorb it into the whirlpool of your own career! They will not mingle. This gentle nature, this Puritanic piety, these homely virtues, this domestic purity, this saintly beauty—what have they to do with the terrible will, the fierce nature, the indomitable ambition, the ruthless daring, the cruel power to forget, hereditary in your race? Spare this flower! Pluck if you will the red rose of honour! But give me my violet, my primrose, Rufus! I sue for it. If you are inexorable, I am absolved. I, too, can put away all tenderness from my heart. I can nurse revenge and concoct venom!’

Rufus looked at her calmly and silently, but answered not one word.

‘ Ah ! how like all your brood are. I read it all. I loved you ; I could love you now. Show pity. Turn but an instant from this implacable resolution, and I will love you still. You might even have triumphed over my weakness so as to have won half my compliance. But you are a Noel. I will then put the bloodhounds on your path. I will prepare for you in the future a terrible fate ! The Nemesis of the present shall arise in a supreme hour and remind you that Margaret pleaded in vain. You are deaf to my entreaty. Farewell.’

She walked like a queen out of the quarry, and left Rufus sitting silently on the block of stone. He sat long in a deep reverie, those glaring, wide blue eyes ever before him. Then he rose with a sudden resolution to shake off the weird fascination, and, calling his dog, went from the quarry prepared to pursue his sport on the hill.

As he advanced he shot some pheasants and hares : finding their weight an encumbrance, he shouldered his gun and walked briskly towards the east, lost in thought. This was somewhat abruptly interrupted by a rude summons :—

‘Eh, moi fine chap (fine fellow), where has tae bin poachin’?’

To this summons Rufus deigned no reply.

‘Art tae t’ chap as wern poachin’ yestern on t’ Ridge?’

‘I was along the Ridge yesterday,’ said Rufus, ‘and shot some game.’

‘Oi thowt sooa. Nae eawt wi’ thy certificate, loike a good-un.’

‘I don’t carry my certificate with me.’

‘Then iv yo’n bin arter no mischief yo’n gie me yore neame.’

‘I never give anything to uncivil people.’

‘What t’ farreps—yore may be no better nur other folk. So as yo’n nother certificate nur neame, we’n see what Squire Leycester o’ Browsholme says to t’ meikle o’ yo (to such as you).’

‘My way does not lie towards Browsholme,’ said Rufus, throwing down his game. Then lifting his gun to his shoulder, he discharged both barrels into the air above his head.

‘Yore as cool a chap as ever oi set ees on, that yo are. Bur fur o (all) that, yore mistaen i’ one thing—yore a poacher, and yore goin’ afoor Squire Leycester, and fro’ Browsholme

I reckon to Preston Gaol, as sure as a gun.'

'My fine fellow, there are always two sides to a bargain. If you are content to walk with me a couple of miles you may satisfy yourself who I am, as I would have told you if you had been civil.'

'Boi gum, oi'll tae (take) thee to Browsholme,' exclaimed Reuben, rushing at Rufus to seize him in his gigantic embrace. Rufus evaded the rush, and, swinging his fowling-piece round, which he held by the barrels, struck the giant so rude a blow at the back of the neck as he passed him that he laid him senseless on the ground, bleeding and stunned. He did not cast a look on his fallen adversary, but sprang over a fence close at hand, to find himself face to face with two other gigantic keepers.

'What, thae 'rt noan content wi' poachin': thae 'll murther a two 'r three folk afore baggin-toime (dinner-time), wilta?' said one giant.

'Nay, we'n put him in a poke loike a pig, an' tak' him to Browsholme, yo'st see,' said the other.

Rufus had scarcely alighted on his feet from the top of the earthen bank of the hedge than

he rushed at one of these fellows, and jobbed his gun-barrel into his stomach, so as to double him up. The other he struck a staggering blow with the butt, but not before he had himself received a severe stroke from a black-thorn across the ear. At the same moment his arms were grasped behind—his elbows drawn together with an irresistible force. A cord was passed round them, and well secured. Then his wrists were, in like manner, tied, and lastly his ankles. As he lay on the ground the three giants stood grinning over him. ‘He’s a brave feighter, that he is.’

‘He’s gi’en me a welt (blow) at back o’ moi yead as ’ll may it warch (ache) for a month.’

‘Boi gum, he’s made moi guts sore.’

‘An’ he’s gi’en me a lick on t’ neck as welly (well nigh) brokken it.’

‘He’s a lithe (nimble) little un, boi gum.’

‘Nae, oi think he’d eawt-run (out-run) Pendle Jem, he’s so leet (light) an’ handy.’

‘Oi’ll bet thee a noggin, Reuben, he con jump to his chin stonnin’.

‘Boi gum, he’s gi’en us a deaunce, hasn’t he?’

‘Nae, meaustur, win yo walk quiet loike

deawn to Browsholme, or shan we carry yo in t' milk cart like a cauf (calf) liggin i' t' strae (straw)?'

Rufus answered not a word.

'He's gotten t' sulks. Goo fot t' cart, Reuben.'

In a few moments the cart arrived. The giants deposited their captive in the straw, covered him with a maud, and drove over the Ridge by a long rutted descent to Browsholme Hall.

Near the Hall they overtook Mr. Leycester's head-keeper. A parley ensued. They explained their errand. The keeper scratched his head.

'Yore in a divil of a mess, Whitakers, oi see. Yo 'n getten howd on an owd friend o' t' squoire, an' boi gum yo 'n get no thanks fro' gentle or simple. Hae han yo clapped yore yeads i' this gin (snare)? Oi know 'n as weel as iv oi'd seen 'im what 'n (who it is) yo 'n clapped i' yore cart loike an unlicked calf beaund (going) to t' butcher. Boi gum, but yore in a bonny scrape. An (if) Lord Salmesbury get scent o' this, Abraham 'll hae to le-ave t' farm loike winkin' (in as short a time as one might



wink the eye). Boi gum, bur yore in a gradely mess. An' what says t' young chap as yo sayn yo 'n taen?'

'Divil a word,' said Reuben. 'He fowt (fought) loike a bloodheawnd. He felled me loike an ox; he doubled up Mark, an' he's had t' belly warch (ache) ever sin'; an' he fot (fetched) Silas a clowt (blow) on t' neck as welly (well nigh) brokken it. Bi th' mass he's a meaustur. Nae who is he, Daniel? Thae knaws.'

'Has nobody telled ye who he is?'

'Never a one.'

'Then oi'll see thee hanged afore Lancaster Castle gate afore oi'll tell thee. By th' mon, yo knawn nowt what you 'n bin abeawt. Yo met welly (well nigh) as so oan 'a stopped t' judge o' t' 'size i' t' sheriff carriage, wi' o (all) t' javelin men abeawt him, as meddle wi' this young chap.'

'Well bur, Daniel, what mun we do?'

'Do? By th' mon! Do? Oi've no gumption (idea). Ste-al yo reawnd to the back o' th' Ha' meet (just) as if yo 'dn browt a buck fro' Lord Salmesbury to eawr squoire. Oi'll goo an' get eawr chaps o (all) eawt o' t' gate

(way). Then done yo, just as yore o'er anent shrubbery yon, looase this young chap, an' he'll walk 'to th' Ha' wi' his gun on his shilder as bowd as a lion. He's i' no scrape, not he. Bur if yo 'd loike yore feyther Abraham to live eawt his days, as his forbears (forefathers) han don, on Longridge Farm, yo mun come in an' eat a piece o' humble pie. By the mon, it's no-an so pleasant, isn't humble pie, but it's better nur clemmin' (fasting) 'beawt heause or home.'

'Do thee come deawn, Daniel, to th' plantation soide, an' looase this born divil thi sell, sin thae kneaws him.'

'Oi'm hanged iv oi do. Bur yo Ridge chaps knawn nowt (nothing) o' gentlefolk. He'll noan touch yo, no moor nur a lamb. Just set him looase, gie him his gun and belt, and come yo to th' Ha', an' oi 'll see if t' squoire 'll let yo off.'

Daniel's directions were followed, and ten minutes later Rufus walked through the lodge gate, as if from sporting. The front door of the Hall was opened by a footman in livery, and he was ushered into Mr. Leycester's library, where he found Daniel explaining gravely his misadventure—a narrative which

the Squire received with peals of laughter. Daniel, half disconcerted, left the library to fulfil the squire's injunction to give the Whitakers a good dinner and plenty of ale and gin.

'Poaching,' said Mr. Leycester—'poaching certainly, but in some manor and after some game that has made these simple hill-folk the tools of a rival or an enemy.'

'We shall have time for all explanations, my dear Leycester, after dinner, over some of your delicious Burgundy. Meanwhile, what is necessary is, first, to seal the lips of these poor fellows, whom I have rudely chastised, and then your help to unravel this plot. The work has been well done, but the game is not yet played out.'

'Doubtless, when you are the loser! I know that a Noel's pluck says—nothing is desperate while life remains.'

They continued chatting till Daniel came to thank the Squire from the Whitakers, and to ask if they might have a word with his honor. The three young giants came a few minutes afterwards into the library, stroking down their hair, and striking their right legs backwards by way of obeisance.

‘Well, Whitakers, you want justice against this gentleman?’

‘Will yore honor ple-ase re-ad this letter, Squoire Leycester,’ said Reuben, who had meanwhile had time to collect his scattered wits over the Squire’s cheer.

‘This Mr. Horrocks holds the Manor under Lord Salmesbury, and you are Horrocks’ keepers?’

‘Meet sae (just so), yore honor,’ said Reuben.

‘Well, the description here tallies well with that of this gentleman, and I think he told you he had killed game on the Ridge yesterday?’

‘True as gospel, yore honor,’ replied Reuben; ‘an’ we seed him kill geame to-day; an’ dun yo see he had t’ geame slung o’er his shilders when oi stopped him.’

‘I suppose your temper was ruffled, Reuben?’

‘Divil a bit, Squoire.’

‘Did you ask him for his certificate and name civilly, Reuben?’

‘Not othegither (altogether so), Squoire, fur yo se-an he pokes his chin i’ th’ wind, an’ coo-ams it o’er me wi’ sich an air, so grand

loike, Squoire, oi axed 'im reythur roughly, yo seen,—that's God's truth—an' oi tow'd 'im as he wur no better nur other folk.'

'Well, what did you think, Reuben, when he sent you sprawling on your face?'

'Boi gum, Squoire, oi dunnot think he's within three inch o' moi heyt (height), an' no-an two-thirds moi girth, bur he's a better mon nur me. He did le-ad us a deawnce (dance), an' no mistake.'

'Well then, Reuben, you are satisfied that he has the pluck of a gentleman. Now I can tell you that he's as generous as he's brave. He thinks he's more than paid you all off for your blunder. He will let me as an old friend and neighbour set you right on one sole condition, of which by-and-by. Horrocks will be satisfied if he gets the value of the game killed, and ask no questions. I will send him two pounds, and set you right with him. As a plaster for your broken head, Reuben, and for Mark's poke in the guts, and Silas's half-broken neck, here's a guinea for each of you. For I know you to be honest Lancashire lads. Get into no more scrapes of this kind.'

'Squoire, iv yo'n sattle wi' t' undertakker,

Horrocks, we'n made up eawr moinds not to tent t' geame (game) nur (until) my lord taks it into his own hont, or yo, Squoire, or some other squoire, yo seen. Bur we'rn stark (strong) chaps, an' wi' yore lave—an yo'n excuse us—we connot do wi' no plaister; wer'en as stark as young bulls; eawr (our) hurts is allays worse fur plaister.'

'Well, well, as you please.'

'Bur for t' condition—if it's to be mum abeawt (about) this job, yo may reckon on us beawt (without) t' plaister, Squoire.'

'If you ever see this gentleman again, you'll be careful not to say what a tussle you had with him.'

'We'en be meet (just) as mum as de-ath—reckon on us.'

'And if anybody ask you what I gave you for the buck you brought me to-day from my Lord Salmesbury, what will you say?'

'We'en say as yo gaen us a capital dinner o' roast poork (pork), an' ingens (onions), an' apple sauce, ale an' whisky i' plenty; an' then yo offered us three gowden guineas for eawr (our) trouble, but we wern much obleeged, and we said it wouldn't pleasur' my lord to year

(hear) as we'dn taen (taken) yore brass so bowdly.'

'Reuben, you're a Lancashire lad of the true breed. Dost thou ever go a-courting?'

Reuben scratched his head. 'Bi toimes, Squire.'

'Well, Reuben, if anybody crossed thee either going to or away from thy wench, what would'st thou do?'

'Do, Squire? oi'd gie him sich a hug as 'ud (would) crack his ribs to splithereens (splinters).'

'Reuben, men are apt to be even less patient with their rivals, or those whom their rivals set on.'

Reuben gave a long, low whistle.

'Sets the wind in that quarter, Squire?'

'I know nothing, Reuben, for my friend there has not given me a hint; but I wager ten to one that you three simpletons have got into this scrape to serve Horrocks, or some other fellow of that sort, in crossing my friend's path, and putting an indignity on him?'

'By th' mon, Squire, but oi moind me he's a gentleman, for, cool as a cucumber, what does he first do, afore he gies us feyt (fight), but he pops off both his barrels.'

‘He’s a gentleman to the backbone, Reuben, and true-bred Lancashire lads like you and your brothers do not cross a gentleman’s path wittingly.’

‘Now—now—(no, no) : will t’ gentleman just let bygones be bygones?’

‘With all my heart,’ said Rufus. ‘You are three fine lads. I bear you no malice whatever, but will do any of you at any time any service in my power. But that does not extend to him who set you on. I shall find out his lurking place, unkennel him, and we will settle accounts by-and-by.’

‘If Meaustur Horrocks did rung (wrong) in writing yon letter, sir, whatever’s yore neame, we’n hae done wi’ him i’ no toime.’

‘I don’t think it was Horrocks.’

‘Then somebody wern behind him, yo think, to set him on?’

‘No; but I don’t think it fair to you, Reuben, whom I have heartily forgiven for your part in this matter, to press you with any questions. I will find it out without your help. Good-bye, my lads. If you keep my counsel, I will keep yours, and befriend you. If you want a farm any of you four years hence, tell



Mr. Leycester, and he will let me know whether you have kept your promise. Good day !' So saying, Rufus dismissed his antagonists, as a conqueror dismisses a captive.

Mr. Leycester was about ten years Rufus's senior. He had been a contemporary of Lord De la Legh and the Vicar at Cambridge, and had contracted the habits of a Sybarite. He was a man of fastidious fashion, but with a genuine taste for art, and a habit of research into archæology, which at an early age made him an authority almost without appeal as to the value and genuineness of pictures, coins, antiques, gems, relics of every kind ; but especially of Greek, Roman, Italian, and mediæval art. The afternoon was spent with Rufus in visiting various rooms of the Hall, in which, on tables, lay cases of precious antiques, submitted to Mr. Leycester's judgment by connoisseurs. Though his own estate was too worm-eaten by debts to permit him to become the possessor of these treasures, he had thus the transient pleasure of studying them, and the satisfaction of finding his judgment appealed to from all quarters. He was a fair-haired, rather short man, of gay, careless address, but with a rapid twinkle in the eye,

showing habits of observation. The languid smile, with its air of ennui, was, perhaps, one of the consequences of some familiarity with the intimate circle of the Regent. Really, he was a ruined man, but he was too careless to ascertain the position of his affairs. If he could avoid extravagance in the indulgence of his artistic taste, he might still, however, keep the wolf from the door for some years. He only knew that he could screw no more money out of his lawyers and men of business. He had sold some of his choicest paintings at a considerable profit. He had sent some of his collections of coins for sale to London, speculating on the authority of his name to secure him a corresponding remuneration. He had dismissed gamekeepers and a useless retinue of servants required for the reception of courtly guests. He retained only a French cook of pre-eminent skill ; a faithful valet ; and Daniel, still called head-keeper, but really the only keeper at Browsholme.

As they wandered through the mansion examining the collections, the weather changed, and night came suddenly with the swoop of the black wings of clouds, threatening storm.

‘I dine at seven usually, Noel. Will that hour suit you?’

‘Perfectly. I have taken the liberty to tell Daniel to find my lad Roger, and I have sent him with a note to Mytton to apprise my father that I am your guest for a day or two.’

‘Most heartily welcome. Roger will bring your valise in an hour or two, no doubt. I shall take my siesta, and meet you in the library at a quarter to seven.’

They parted. Rufus had much to think about. He had, however, with a quick intuition, adopted his resolutions. He was prepared for his conversation with his host. That which he could not penetrate was the way in which his path had been beset, and himself entangled in an ignoble encounter. He awaited the arrival of Roger. About six o'clock Roger appeared with his master's valise. Daniel had not uttered a word to him about the encounter with the Whitakers. Roger asked no questions why his master had altered his plans. He brought a letter from Sir Hubert, approving heartily of his visit to Browsholme, and giving him a hint to persuade Leycester to retrench, travel, and save his estate. He had not made

up his mind what to say to Roger, whose help he wanted to unkennel his concealed enemy. He therefore descended to the library when dressed, and awaited his host. Five minutes before seven Mr. Leycester appeared. Precisely at seven the valet opened a door which led from the library into a large dining hall. There was a small table in the centre of this great room, and a lamp on this table, so shaded as to throw the light on the cloth. There was no other light in the room. It was warm, but everywhere, except in the little radiant centre, the table was surrounded by a continually deepening gloom, ending in the dark panels of oak on the sides, and in the blacker recesses draped here and there with old tapestry. There was not a dish on the bright centre; only some exquisite Sèvres plates; some beautiful Venetian glass bottles; a gem or two of silver filagree; old silver knives and forks, evidently the heirlooms of generations. There were three seats. Mr. Leycester took the head of the table, and pointed to a chair at the side for Rufus. The dinner was sent in dish by dish by the French cook — soup, fish, entrées, exquisite *morceaux*, one after the other—a Chinese pro-

cession of interminable varieties. Mr. Leycester tasted each, praised, criticised, and made a fastidious meal of morsels from each triumph of his cook's art. Rufus had never seen anything like this before. He found difficulty in getting anything for his rude appetite. He emptied a whole plateau of fish; looked at sundry entremets; got a wing of fowl out of some curry; rescued a partridge from a Spanish dish betraying garlic; and so made a dinner. Dessert consisted of only two or three plates of grapes and peaches, with dried fruits. The famous Burgundy was before him. The attendants disappeared.

‘The law of my house is that from this moment no one enters unless summoned; but to-night, to secure us from intrusion, I will draw the bolt.’ He pulled a string under the table, and a bolt was heard to slide at the door into its socket.

‘But have you invited your chaplain to the third seat?’

‘You remember, Rufus, that I was your cousin De la Legh's friend. His path and mine diverged, but I have known all his history, and have sympathised deeply with him in the

blight which fell upon his youth. This has won me the goodwill of one whom I must call his aunt—Margaret of Pendle. My house-keeper was first in the service of your uncle Wentworth and his wife, and I suppose that it is with Mrs. Constable's help, and also in her presence, behind the arras that hangs in that recess, that I have visits from Margaret, who becomes my guest when I am alone, and strives to rouse within me the energies of the better nature for which she gives me credit, but which, if I ever possessed it, is enervated or dead.'

'And do you think it probable that she may come to-night?'

'After what you have related of your adventures, I anticipate that she will seek this occasion also to warn you.'

'She strives with diligence and skill to counteract my grandmother's plots; but here she aids her.'

'Remember that all that you say will be in the presence not of Margaret only, but, also of Mrs. Constable behind the tapestry.'

They then talked in a low voice about Rufus's adventure. He confided to Mr. Leycester the whole course of his passion for

Alice. His absolute fascination—the elevation and purity which had refused to receive proposals unsanctioned by his own father, and unknown to Mr. Hindle; his interview with Margaret; his silence when she pleaded with him to abandon his suit; his decision to accept Alice's own terms—to win his father's consent by years of faithful service in the fulfilment of his political designs. Then, this acquiescence won, his determination to offer to Mr. Hindle to make his daughter his wife, if he could gain her consent. Without this approval, to submit to Alice's sentence of banishment as the greatest proof of his homage.

‘A tough job,’ said Leycester; ‘are you sure of yourself in this decision?’

‘Well, I have only fought one tough fight yet—my college career—and my resolution never failed me there. At all events, I consent to four years' exile in order to make this conquest of my father.’

‘You are capable of that which it is not in my Epicurean nature to perform—Spartan self-restraint, tenacity of resolution, self-reliant vigour, with a constitution of iron, and the

genius of your race. Even your father's resolution must give way before you.'

'If it do not, I will not disturb this old man Hindle's peace. I love Alice Hindle with my whole soul, but her filial piety is the purest emotion of her heart. The daughter shall cherish the father. She has touched me with an angel's wing. I can emulate her own self-devotion. I will do her peace no harm. But I want to tell her this in justice to myself.'

As he spoke, Margaret glided out of the circle of surrounding darkness almost noiselessly into the vacant chair. Though Rufus was prepared by Leycester to expect her entrance from some door in the panelling behind the tapestry, yet the apparition of her golden tresses gleaming like silk, of her seer-like eyes, and her great beauty coming into the bright circle of light reflected from the shade above the lamp, somewhat startled him.

'Leycester has led me to expect you would be his guest to-night, Margaret, or I might have been disturbed by your appearance.'

'I come usually to warn Leycester, the friend of your cousin De la Legh; and to save him, if possible, from death in the



Epicurean sty. But to-night my errand is to you, Rufus.'

'You have heard what is my design, Margaret?'

'Rufus, I yearn towards you with a mother's tenderness. But you do not yet know the curse that rests upon your house. Even were you married, the blood of the Corsican is in your veins. Listen to my story, then you will see what to avoid. Your grandmother was of a noble Corsican family, beautiful as black Italian women with olive-coloured skins are, but severe as Catherine dei Medici. She found me the child of a poor clergyman, a fair English child, the contrast of herself. She took me from my home, loved me, fondled me as though I had been of her own blood, taught me herself, lavished upon me endearments, reared me in the accomplishments of the highest classes from pure impulse, without design, knowing not what she did. I was fit in voice and attractions to be a *prima donna* of the Opera. She never dreamed that her son, her favourite son, would fall desperately in love with her idol. He did. He was loyal to his mother. He never confessed his love to me till he had

told her how he was enthralled. She looked down into the gulf of the fathomless pit, and plotted my destruction. First she tried to turn Wentworth by travel, absence, politics, diplomacy, anything. All failed. I was all the while unconscious, and clung to my patroness as to a mother. She could not believe my simplicity, nor Wentworth's truth. She thought me treacherous, and Wentworth betrayed by a consummate intriguer. She resolved to be our match, according to her own conception of our duplicity. When nothing would avail, she permitted her son to write a letter to me which she herself delivered. It took me entirely by surprise. I at once said that I had never thought of Lord Wentworth but as her son, and that I regarded myself as an orphan raised by her love and bounty; that I had no love to give to anyone but to her. She listened with a look of entire disbelief. She told me I could prove what I said in one way only, and that was by telling Lord Wentworth that I had determined to go on to the stage "as a public singer." This was not true. Then, that I was pre-engaged in marriage. That was equally false. Then, that I had no idea of his regard,

and, with all respect, no tenderness for him. This was so far true that my admiration of him had never made me unfaithful in thought to my protectress. I wrote at her dictation, and thought the matter over. I told the Countess that her house—though the home of my life—was no longer a home for me. I could not meet Lord Wentworth after this reply. She suspected me of wishing to get beyond her control to carry on an intrigue with him. She was inexorable; she bound me to the stake. I was henceforth her companion, a sort of upper menial; I read to her, wrote for her, fetched and carried, sat up all night if she were restless and ill, but was always under surveillance. Wentworth was provoked beyond all endurance. It was an ill day when in appearance he made his mother consent to give him her companion as his wife. On conditions—conditions—conditions! A private marriage by special licence, not to be disclosed for five years; settlements, a dower of £2,000 a year, in which Wentworth's brother was to join as next heir. One year's absence in Italy or elsewhere. On our return I was to consent to retirement till the five years were out. Went-

worth submitted to all. We were privately married, spent a year abroad, returned happy and united. He lavished upon me tenderness without limit. Equipages, a house in Berkeley Square. Only—seclusion! Lady Wentworth, rather by courtesy than of right! This galled, but the five years gradually wore out. The Corsican mother watched; she hoped Wentworth's passion would exhaust itself. On the contrary, it grew! He was impatient for the time when he could do me justice! Moreover, I was about to be a mother!

‘One morning at breakfast he had the “Morning Post” in his hand. He was reading. He fainted from his chair. The physician came. He sent for his brother. When he came the “Morning Post” was sent for. The brother read in it the confession of a man executed that morning for forgery at Newgate:—

“I confess to having assisted in the fraudulent private marriage of a lady to Lord Wentworth. It was represented to me that he wished to make her his mistress, and I was paid £500 for this fraud. The licence and register were false, so were the settlements. No marriage took place.”

‘Herbert Noel came to me and said that his brother had got his deathblow. He could not survive the conviction of his mother’s perfidy. His only reparation was to make me that day his wife. The Corsican had foreseen this crisis. Herbert procured a special licence for the marriage. Our own parish priest appeared. We were about to be wedded, when Herbert withdrew the clergyman. I shall never forget his terrible whisper, which I heard as they descended the stairs :—“The Countess forbids the marriage on the ground of blood-relationship, though not within the prohibited degrees—of which she holds the proof. Margaret is the child of our own father.” That blow killed her son. It was the lie which a month’s legal investigation would have disproved. He died with the dreadful thought that I was his half-sister, by my mother’s infidelity.

‘These successive blows, however, caused my own premature confinement, and I awoke from a state of unconsciousness to find my child lying lifeless by the side of my bed. When I recovered, I refused Herbert’s offer to pay me the dower. I took my jewels, sold them, bought an annuity beyond my wants, and have lived

since that day at the Owlets' Hole on the flank of Pendle. Rufus, that is the history of Margaret of Pendle. Beware even of yourself. I warn you, as the lover of Alice Hindle, you risk your life—as her husband you would wreck your fortunes. Tempt not the Corsican blood to do a cruel wrong such as that which killed your uncle and made me an outcast. I stand in your path. You cannot approach this maiden but with the extremest peril. If you disbelieve or brave this warning, settle your affairs; for you court your own destruction, or will cause that of Alice Hindle.'

'Margaret, you are like one of the Fates to our house. Prescribe the securities, and Alice shall have all that I can procure for her.'

'You can give no security that she shall not be your victim. I can accept none.'

As she was still speaking she rose from her seat and walked into the deep darkness of a recess. After a pause Rufus lifted up the shade of the lamp. The whole recess was illuminated. There was nothing there but the tapestry lining the wall.

Rufus thought: 'She has some chamber in the wall protected from intrusion.'

Leycester was in a deep reverie. He raised his head, and said :

‘Rufus, neglect not her warning. Abandon this suit ; or make up your mind to meet the fate which she foretells.’

‘I am not accustomed, Leycester, to draw back.’

## CHAPTER VIII.

PENDLETON HALL is one of the small houses of the almost extinct race of yeomen-squires which has been absorbed into the families of the greater landed gentry, or drifted away into the great adventures of trade. Twenty-five years before the opening of our story, a cousin of Mr. Hindle of Harwood Cliff lived there as a yeoman, cultivating a farm which was his own small estate. With this pursuit he united that of a wool-stapler, and carried on a trade with Bradford in Wiltshire, whither he took some of the longer wools of the Pennine Chain and border, and whence, for certain purposes of the Yorkshire manufactures, he brought the short, but fine, lambs'-wool of the Southdown sheep, fed on the chalk downs of Wiltshire and Hampshire.

In his rambles in the South he was often the guest of a farmer at Chippenham, whose daughter had been brought up in the family of



the neighbouring clergyman. She had been a companion of his only child—a child of fairy-like beauty—so wonderfully seductive that it captivated the fancy of the Countess De la Legh, then on a visit to a family of rank in the neighbourhood. The clergyman was easily flattered by a lady of fashion and high rank to permit his child to become her guest; she carried her off to London. There she lavished upon her everything that the most fanciful tenderness could suggest; for, having no daughter, she thus filled up that void in her affections. The girl was educated in every accomplishment with solicitude, and so became gradually an exile from her natural home, and the adopted daughter of the Countess De la Legh. Yet, from time to time, this fair creature appeared in her father's simple home, to astonish himself and her former companion, the farmer's daughter, with the development of form, feature, and grace, to which the training of her new home had added the charm of manners formed in the presence of the highest models. The force of her early affections was unabated; she clung to her father, she cherished with a sincere love her early companion. To her she brought,

whenever she came, proofs of her regard ; wrote from time to time when absent ; and when, at length, she heard of her intended marriage to Mr. Roger Hindle of Pendleton, a *trousseau* arrived, to express her unaltered affection. By-and-by, at Pendleton Hall, the bride received a letter with the news that Miss Forester was about to follow her example. Then, from Italy, came for two years letters giving an account of migrations from Venice to Rome, to Naples, to Palermo, and back again to Genoa. Then letters from London, describing a life happy in domestic quiet with her husband. All these letters had been signed simply ‘Margaret ;’ but they were all written in that beautiful Italian hand which her friend had imitated from old MSS. Then came a blank, a silence—no letter, no message—months, dreary months, of interval, with no sign of the old tender remembrance.

At length, one day there arrived a man of business from Lancaster. He was a Quaker gentleman, mild and affable in his manners ; he had, he said, a letter of introduction from a lady whom Mrs. Hindle had formerly known as Miss Forester. He produced the letter ; it was thus worded :—

‘DEAR MARY,—I have sent Mr. Satterthwaite to ascertain whether there is not some nook close to you where I and my father’s old clerk and gardener and his wife can take shelter out of the storms of life. Let Mr. Satterthwaite look about on your husband’s farm. He knows my wants—the chief of which is to be near you, dear Mary, who will remember your old playmate,

‘MARGARET.’

Mr. Satterthwaite explained that he wanted to find some secluded cottage, with a garden, which would not be unattractive to a lady of elegant tastes. Mary clapped her hands with joy.—‘My husband has the very place ; a pretty house which he built for his own mother on a holm under a big rock, all overhung with ivy, near the stream in the beech-wood.’

Mr. Satterthwaite was satisfied with the cottage. He busied himself about furnishing it, and in a few days, excepting such additions as the taste of its new proprietor might suggest, it was ready for the expected guest.

The little house was picturesque ; it was called the ‘Owlets’ Hole,’ because the ivy tops

which overhung the rock were the haunt of owls. The level plot before it was bordered by a brawling stream, which leaped into this recess from a higher level. Huge boles of beech-trees surrounded the sunny space in which the cottage, the cascade, and the garden lay. A high paling was ordered by Mr. Satterthwaite round the whole circumference, so as to shut out all intrusion. This paling was pierced by only one gate, through which the path from Pendleton Hall led to the Owlets' Hole. The old clerk and his wife arrived, and were welcomed by Mrs. Hindle as familiar friends. They only knew that Mrs. Margaret had returned in widow's weeds to her father's house ; that some blight had fallen on the old gentleman ; that he had been palsied, and died ; that Mrs. Margaret had brought them to Lancaster, where they had lived on the shores of Morecambe Bay for a month ; and that she would follow them as soon as the paling was finished and all the workmen gone away. Accordingly, a month later, when this expensive barrier was completed, the gate finished, and the little fortress of the Owlets' Hole shut within its impregnable stockades, Mr. Satterthwaite again appeared. He examined

the premises, and pronounced all to be satisfactory. Then, from Clitheroe some carts climbed the hill laden with cases. These were, under Mr. Satterthwaite's directions, unpacked. They contained the china, glass, and plate of the rectory. Then the rector's and his daughter's library, for which suitable shelves had been prepared in the cottage; then some pet pieces of furniture—gifts of her husband, reminiscences of friends. Mary knew her playmate's tastes, and arranged everything as she thought it would please her eye. The garden was trim; it was the leafy month of June. Next day Mr. Satterthwaite would bring the future tenant of the Owlets' Hole.

She came—more beautiful, Mary thought, than ever. She wore her widow's weeds, but those grand tresses of gold mocked them. That form of elastic youth, those eyes, blue as the sky, yet gleaming with a supernatural light. Such a creature could not live in such a solitude without awakening superstition.

A few months before this time, Sir Hubert had inherited the estates and baronetcy of a collateral branch, by the special conditions of the patent. He was then a young man of

twenty-five. He was fond of country sports—much among the people—knew all the news of the country—was chairman of the bench of magistrates at Clitheroe, and his name was in every mouth. The mysterious tenant of the Owlets' Hole, though seldom seen beyond the path which led thence to Pendleton Hall, startled the country folk and the casual passer-by with her wonderful beauty and grace. The fame of these—the mystery of her life—reached Sir Hubert. Was this Margaret the Margaret Forester—the idol of his mother—whose history involved the tragic fate of his brother? His private inquiries confirmed the suspicion. Why had she chosen this place as a home—so near him? Was it for revenge? He wrote to his mother. His letter had an unlooked-for result. The Dowager Countess herself, attended by her confessor, the Abbé Salvatore, appeared at Mytton. She settled herself there. The Abbé was much at Stoneyhurst and elsewhere. A large portion of the tenantry of neighbouring estates retains its traditional connection with the Catholic Church. There are small Roman Catholic chapels all over the country, in which humble priests, living on small stipends, tend the tenantry of the Catholic

gentry. Not long after the Abbé Salvatore's arrival a rumour spread, first among the Roman Catholic tenants, that there were *feorin* (fairies) on Pendle. Soon the story ran that a witch lived with some owls in a cleft in a rock hid by a cascade in a dark wood on the side of Pendle. Then that the witch had come to 'spite' some folk that had done her wrong. They would know whom she wished to spite, for they would have murrain in their 'shippons,' 'rot' among the sheep. The *tean-la* could not break her spell. She had the evil eye. If any maiden pined, it was the Pendle witch. If any lad lost his way in a snowstorm on Pendle, he had been bewildered by the witch. By-and-by, these superstitions gathered strength and consistency. They came to have particular and personal applications.

Meanwhile, Margaret had made a firm friend of Roger Hindle, and through him of the family of the Hindles. She came to know them one by one at Pendleton Hall. She charmed them all. They told her of the superstitious stories current respecting her. She listened with attention, and sent for Mr. Satterthwaite. She had a long consultation with him. He brought

to her the clergyman of Clitheroe, and to him Margaret explained that she suspected that the prevalence of these rumours was promoted by her enemy, the Countess De la Legh. She expected them to be only preparatory to some popular outrage. She therefore asked him to keep his eye on the machinations of emissaries among the Catholic tenantry. She seemed to arouse herself to combat her implacable enemy. Roger, at her desire, procured for her the aid of a man who had been employed in the Manchester police. This man he set to dog the steps of the Abbé Salvatore.

The Countess had not reckoned with Margaret for her perfidy—for the death of her husband—for the misery of her late life—for the death of her father. She did not know the feline rage with which, if still hounded by her emissaries, Margaret could turn to bay. The great blue eyes glared like those of a tigress when the thought of defending her life against her enemy crossed the mind of Margaret, now made desperate by persecution. Had the Countess known the vigour of will which misfortune had only made more sinewy and strong, she might have hesitated to attempt to consum-



mate the dictates of her hatred and suspicion. She had, however, resolved to put Margaret out of the way of the family fortunes. She did not foresee that little more was needed to inspire Margaret with the idea that she was a Fate to avenge her own wrongs, and wield the award of destiny against the wrongdoer. Yet, if she had seen Margaret pacing her garden at night, or looked into the glare of those once beautiful and now awful eyes, she might have been warned.

The storm, which had been gathering for some time, appeared about to burst on Margaret of Pendle. In that remote and wild forest region the belief in witches and witchcraft was still universal among the vulgar. The Abbé found an attorney willing to prepare a charge against Margaret, which, though it might fail before the bench, would fix on her the reputation of a witch. The places where murrain among the cattle had baffled all remedies, and left a mysterious sense of malignant power, afforded the chief sources for such a charge. The police agent tracked the Abbé and the attorney. Their wiles and preparations were all revealed to Roger Hindle. Margaret was now goaded by

misfortune, and turned in agony to bay against her persecutor. She had spent five years of married life in the highest society of Europe, with an accomplished man of high rank devotedly attached to his wife. This had developed her experience—her knowledge of the world—her appreciation of character. The tragic fate of her husband, caused by the perfidy of his mother—the ruthless way in which she had sacrificed her son and the idol of her fancy to her pride and ambition, had made Margaret conscious that the Dowager Lady De la Legh would not hesitate to accomplish her purposes by any crime. She could not present in an English Court a charge of witchcraft. That might still be done in Corsica, but not, as she was instructed, here. But the police agent found that vague charges of maliciously causing the death of the dairy stock of certain farms, and of compassing and procuring the death of a young girl, were to be preferred against her. Margaret pondered. It was clear that no evidence could be presented to the Justices of the Peace which could induce them to convict her upon these charges. But she might be exposed to popular outrage as a reputed witch. Her courage rose with her

peril. She would combat the wily and unscrupulous Corsican like a Fate commissioned to punish. She had frequent private conferences with her agent, Mr. Satterthwaite, and with Mr. Roger Hindle, who alone communicated with the police agent. The Town Clerk of Clitheroe belonged to the old Church and King party, who possessed the entire power in the corporation. If he were made her legal adviser—if the meshes of the Abbé's plot were exposed to him—if it were made clear that the Abbé had been secretly working on the superstition of the Roman Catholic tenantry—if she could thus, without the suspicion of the Countess or the Abbé, place herself under the protection of the Corporation of Clitheroe, she would be secure from the outrage of a mob, and she would be able to allow the whole plot to explode in the Court-house, to the confusion of those who would, by the evidence of the police agent, be there proved to have been its promoters.

Mr. Roger Hindle and Mr. Satterthwaite cautiously revealed the whole matter step by step to the Town Clerk. The Mayor was privately shown the evidence as a ground for making provision against a popular tumult. Arrange-

ments were made to swear in the usual posse of special constables on the morning of any day which might be appointed for the hearing of the charge. And Margaret was to spend the night at the house of the clergyman, and to be in the magistrates' private room when the superstitious mob expected her to enter the streets of Clitheroe. Thus the first danger of popular outrage would be avoided.

The summonses were taken out and served. They came from several homesteads which had been afflicted with murrain, and from one family in which a girl had died of consumption. The Town Clerk secretly laboured at the rebutting evidence. As the day approached a rumour spread through the country with terrible distinctness. The Witch of Pendle, who had tormented all the farms with murrain, was to be burned alive in the market-place at Clitheroe, by order of the Justices, at mid-day. Another report was that the Justices had ordered that she was 'to go through the Water Trial in the Ribble as soon as the market was full.' The fear of malignant powers which had robbed the homesteads of their most valuable stock, worked on the imaginations of the solitary and super-

stitious herdsmen of the valleys of the Hodder and Ribble, and on the shepherds of Pendle, Waddington, and Bowland. There was a gathering of rude farming-men on the road which led from Pendleton Hall to Clitheroe, waiting for the appearance of the witch. The attorney had mustered his witnesses of credulous farmers in a neighbouring tavern. But in the street was a fiercer group, armed with clubs, and gathered from remote quarters, evidently marshalled under the command of a leader, to give a practical issue to the vague horror which the mob had of the power of the reputed witch. The Court-house, however, was well guarded by special constables. The place where the accused was ordinarily placed was kept separate from the mass which filled the Court. At eleven o'clock the magistrates assembled. The attorney at whose instance the summonses had been obtained seemed taken aback at the skilful precautions used, and still more when, on being summoned, a lady of supreme beauty, and with almost supernatural eyes, was, amidst general surprise, lead by the Incumbent of Clitheroe to a seat in the dock, where he took a seat by her side. A deputy acted for the Town Clerk.

The attorney called his first witness. He was a simple hill-farmer, living in a lonely homestead at the head of the valley of Sabden. The charge was that Margaret Forester, of the Owlets' Hole, had maliciously, and of design aforethought, caused a disease in the stock of Nelson Wilkinson, whereof several had died. The evidence of the farmer was to the effect that he and his sons had seen Margaret Forester 'gathering yarbs' on his farm; that she had gone quietly up to some of the cattle and stroked their necks, and given them 'yarbs' to eat. That within a week two of the lean stock had sickened and died, and that then the murrain had got among the dairy stock, and they had died one after the other. A murmur of indignation ran through the crowd in the body of the Court. But the evidence appeared to point rather to the administration of poisonous herbs than to witchcraft.

The Town Clerk, in his cross-examination, asked whether the first two lean cattle that had died were bred on the farm? No; they had been bought at Settle Market. How long before? A week or ten days. Had the farmer ascertained whether they came from a healthy

herd, or a farm free from murrain? He had not. Did he suppose that the 'yarbs' which Margaret Forester had given the cattle had poisoned them?

'Nowt o' t' socart (Nothing of the sort).'

'Why did he then mention the giving of the "yarbs" to the cattle?'

The farmer smiled an incredulous smile, as though the question was simply put in pretended ignorance.

'Nae, dunnot go may (make) a pretence o' not knowing witches' tricks. They gathern fernseed boi moonleet (moonlight), an' they known weel t'rings weer (where) t'feorin (fairies) deaunce, and tey (they) pull'n up gress (gather the grass) at eaut side o' t'ring, an tey seyn feau words (they say foul, strange words), as bewitchen mon or beeast as ates (eat) what teyn (they have) gathered.'

'Then you think,' said the Town Clerk, 'that the cattle were not maliciously killed, with poisonous herbs, but bewitched?'

'Just as yo sayn. Hoo bewitched em, an' tey deed (died) t'one at after t'other nur (until) tey wern o (all) de-ad.'

'Do you say that Margaret Forester did any other thing than thus bewitch these cattle?'

‘Noa, meauster, oi dunnot.’

‘She did not poison them?’

‘Not hoo (she); woi should hoo (she), when hoo could may an eend on ’em (make an end of them—kill them) boi witchcraft, yo seen?’

‘You brought the two lean young stock that first died from Settle?’

‘Oi did; an hoo (she) were very fause (cunning), yo seen, to bewitch them t’first, fur it looked as if tey ’dn browt t’murraïn fro’ Settle.’

The Town Clerk sat down without making a remark. Sir Hubert Noel was not on the bench, but the Chairman leaned over to the attorney and said that evidence of witchcraft formed no support to the charge. He asked if the other corroborative evidence was of the same complexion, or whether there was any evidence of malicious poisoning, or injury, or of the introduction of diseased stock, to support the imputation of malicious design.

The attorney had no such evidence to produce.

The Magistrates consulted, and dismissed the charge.

The attorney then said that he had several



cases of a similar kind from various homesteads, in none of which could he hope, with his present evidence, to support such a charge as their worships would alone listen to. If they would not admit a charge of witchcraft as a proof of malicious design, he must pass to a case of a different kind.

He placed a young man in the box. This young man, James Massey, gave evidence that he had heard that the lady at the Owlets' Hole was a famous witch. He had been courting Nancy Garnett, but she would, at first, have nothing to say to him, because he had been wild and given to drink. That he had really been steady a long time, and that he got a friend to speak for him to Nancy Garnett, to show her that he had saved money, and to ask her to 'keep company' with him. But she was a Wesleyan and he was a Catholic; and though he had become steady, she would have nothing to say to a Catholic. He bethought him of the witch. He watched for her. One day, on her way to Pendleton Hall from the Owlets' Hole, he respectfully stopped her, and asked her to give him a 'love-philtre,' to make Nancy like him. She promised him to speak to Nancy,

and ascertain what were her objections to him, if she would come to the Owlets' Hole. Whereupon he got his friend to go with Nancy Garnett to the Owlets' Hole.

The Town Clerk cross-examined.

'Did this lady ask you any question when you spoke to her about the "love-philtre"?'

'She did.'

'What did she say?'

'She axed (asked) me who had given me the notion that she could make "love-philtres".'

'Well, what did you reply?'

'O! oi towd her 'at Feyther (Father) Salvatore towd me hoo were (she was) a known witch, an' nobody could help me as surely as hoo (she) could.'

'How came you to speak to Father Salvatore?'

'He coom to eawr heause (our house), an' said ut Feyther Kyle had towd him what straits oi' wur in, an' ut oi couldn't i' no gate (way) get Nancy Garnett to wed me woile oi were a Catholic. Hoo'd (she would) wed me fast enough iv oi'd turn Methody.'

'Well, what then?'

'Well, yo' seen, Feyther Salvatore said ut if

oi'd get a "love-philtre" fro' t' Witch o' Pendle, Nancy ud be so fond on me ut hoo'd become a gradely (regular) Catholic.'

The next witness was a pretty Catholic married woman, a friend of Nancy Garnett and the last witness.

She gave evidence that she went with Nancy Garnett to the Witch of Pendle, at the Owlets' Hole. She talked with them like a lady. Mistress Roger Hindle 'was by.' She asked Nancy what objection she had to James Massey, since he said he had, for her sake, become quite steady and saved money. Nancy said she was a Wesleyan and James was a Catholic, and that her minister told her she would be 'unequally yoked' if she married him. Then the lady told her she looked very delicate—had a cough—and advised her not to marry at all; but promised to send the Clitheroe doctor to see her, and meanwhile gave her a writing to take to the druggist in Clitheroe. That she went with Nancy to the druggist's, believing that this was the 'love-philtre.' That they gave the paper to the druggist, who wrote a copy of it in his book and gave it back to them. That Nancy took home a bottle. That she took the

‘philtre’ day by day; and the Clitheroe doctor came to see her, and read the writing. That James went to see her often. That he saw Father Kyle. That Father Kyle said she would not live to be James’s wife. That Father Salvatore said that the witch had given her a philtre which had bewitched her with love of James and then killed her.

The Town Clerk asked this witness no questions, but called the druggist, who proved that the supposed ‘love-philtre’ was an anodyne, to allay the irritation of disease in the lungs.

He was followed by the surgeon, who confirmed this evidence, and said that Nancy Garnett had died of consumption, and that in her illness she had frequently seen Father Kyle, and had told him that, knowing that she must die, she wished to part friends with her lover, James Massey, and, with her minister’s consent, she would see him as though he were her intended husband.

Father Kyle was himself put in the witness-box, and compelled to confirm this evidence. He had felt little hope that Nancy would become a Catholic, but had encouraged James Massey to persevere.

This was corroborated by the Wesleyan minister, who had thought it better that Nancy should die in charity with her lover.

This charge, therefore, of the 'love-philtre' was a mere superstition of James Massey. The Magistrates dismissed the charge.

The attorney declined to present any other charges.

The Town Clerk inquired whether Father Salvatore was in Court. He was not there. 'Then,' said the Town Clerk, 'I give notice to your worships of my intention, on behalf of my client, to indict the Father Salvatore, and some of the other parties to these charges, for conspiracy; and I apply to your worships for the committal of the Father Salvatore to answer this charge at the next assizes at Lancaster.'

'We shall require to hear evidence, and any reply which may be made to the charge,' said the Chairman.

'The evidence shall be presented, and I shall apply for a summons that the Abbé appear before you.'

The Chairman then addressed the lady before him, and said that he greatly regretted that she should have been subjected to any

indignity from mere superstition, or, if the charge of conspiracy could be sustained, from any malicious design; but that he was glad to see that the Incumbent and Mayor were at hand to protect her, and that he hoped that through their vigilance she would escape from any further annoyance from vulgar credulity.

The Mayor, the Town Clerk, and the special constables then surrounded Margaret, and passing through the Magistrates' private room to a garden at the back of the house, they reached the Mayor's carriage, which was in waiting in a lane at the foot of the garden, and drove privately out of the town before the mob were aware that the charges were all dismissed. The Mayor's carriage conveyed Margaret to Whalley—to Mr. Hindle's cousin's house—for the night. But when it had been dismissed, Margaret seemed restless and excited. To baffle pursuit she would not remain there. She would have no attendant. She put on a humble dress, and hiding her figure in a cloak, walked into the outer darkness. She rapidly pursued her solitary walk past Mytton Hall to a little inn near the bridge over the Ribble. She had tied her great golden tresses in a knot at the

back of her head, had drawn the hood of the cloak over them, and had exchanged the dress which she had worn in Court for a simple linsey-woolsey gown. She looked like a wayfarer. She entered the little inn, and asked for some tea alone in the parlour. The afternoon was closing fast into a night of deluge and storm. There had apparently been heavy rain on the Bleasedale Moors, on the hills of Bowland Forest, and above Settle, for the Ribble and the Hodder were swollen into furious floods.

Margaret's qualities of genius, overwrought by great wrongs, and strained by intolerable misfortunes, were excited almost to madness in her resistance to the persecution of her enemy. Who shall define the limit of such exaltation, and say where moral accountability ceases in the frenzy of an over-mastering idea which possesses the victim? Already, indications have transpired that the delicate fibre of her brain might yield to the irresistible impulse of some thought of vengeance which might suggest to her modes of triumph over her enemies, extravagant in their character to calm thought, but the natural outbursts of an imagination made wild, and of

feelings smarting under the sting of the sharpest wrong, goading the sufferer to the verge of insanity.

So Margaret rushed now on she knew not what! She did that on which she could never reflect with peace. She wished to punish the Abbé by giving him a vision of the possible issue of his machinations, but she encountered a catastrophe from which she shrank with horror.

In a state bordering on frenzy she sat down in the little inn. She knew that the Abbé Salvatore was in a priest's seminary not far away. She could imitate the Countess's handwriting. Her eyes gleamed as she wrote, in Italian, this letter:—

‘FATHER CONFESSOR,—They have done their work too cruelly at Clitheroe. They tried the witch in the Ribble, and her corpse has been seen floating past Henthorn, and is in some pool near at hand. Come to me at once! We will have the Ribble dragged, and the body recovered. I cannot forget that she was my idol once. I must see you instantly, as you value my life.

‘M. S. DE LA LEGH.’

There was a wild slip of a lad in the



kitchen. Accompanied by this lad, in the darkness and storm, Margaret wended her way to the bridge over the Hodder, furnished with a large lantern. She told the lad that the note came from Lady De la Legh, at Mytton Hall. He was to enquire at the seminary if the Father Salvatore was in the house. If so, he was to leave the note, but not to await any answer. The Abbé was in the house. A brother took the letter to him. Margaret waited in the tempest for his coming forth. He came out by-and-by, blinded by the black darkness of the night, wrapped in his cloak, but otherwise exposed to the pitiless storm. She dogged his steps towards the Hodder bridge. As he approached she drew nearer, and when he was close to a stile which led by a footpath to the old broken bridge, she stood before him in the full light of the large open lantern streaming from the wall. She wished him to believe her, at least for a moment, to be the spectre of the victim of his own machinations—sacrificed by the superstitious mob—whose body the Countess said had been seen floating in the flood near Henthorn. Let him look his crime in the face!

The golden hair which had fallen on her

shoulders—the dilated eyes—the supernatural beauty—terrified him. The spectre said :—

‘Stay, Father, you are in search of my body ; it is in the pool under the old bridge. Come this way, and we will look at it.’

The Father screamed with the agony of guilt and superstition. He sprang through the stile. The spectre followed him. ‘*In the pool under the old bridge,*’ it said, as it hunted him down the path. ‘*In the pool under the old bridge,*’ it repeated. He rushed, stumbling, forward. ‘*My body floats on the pool. There ! There ! Do you see it ?*’ He was maddened with fear. Before he knew what he was doing, he had stumbled on the slippery rocks, and fallen into the pool. The river was swollen with a furious flood. The body was swept away into the eddies of the pool, and whelmed in its depths.

A terrible change had come over Margaret. The Countess had turned her to bay, little knowing what genius and energy she had nurtured to resist her, when she put first happiness and reputation, and now life itself, in jeopardy. The idea which had possessed Margaret was that the instrument of the Countess’s

plot must be terrified by a vision of the possible consequences of his crime. To drive him away, Margaret, in her exaltation, even contemplated leaving her own fate a mystery, by disappearance from the country. But the Abbé's guilty terror precipitated him into the whirling pool of the Hodder. He disappeared before her dilated eyes. She witnessed the first effects of her own wrath. She started back from the fate of her victim. The suddenness of this catastrophe staggered and sickened what remained of the woman in the terrible being inspired and goaded by wrongs. She leaned against a tree to recover from the stunning blow of witnessing so frightful a death.

By-and-by she seemed to revive. She regained the road. She became conscious that she had been under the influence of an unnatural excitement. She trembled lest her mind should permanently lose its balance. She reeled back to the little inn, and thence, along the west bank of the Ribble, wended her way to Clitheroe, upheld by the deep sense of the wrongs she had suffered, and reached the Owlets' Hole itself about midnight, drenched with the storm.

The terrible catastrophe she had witnessed had for the time exalted her imagination almost to madness. The walk through the tempestuous night, though it had tamed, had not exorcised this frenzy; it again awoke to activity when she resolved to drive her enemy away. As soon as she had changed her dress, she sat down and wrote this letter to the Countess De la Legh:—

‘MADAM,—When I was too inexperienced to suspect your perfidy, you suborned a felon to desecrate a sacrament of the Church; you betrayed your son by a crime which cost him his life, and cast me forth to a destiny full of agony. The steps of your agent Salvatore have been tracked. My legal advisers hold in their hands the proofs of your complicity with him in a conspiracy to defeat justice by a tumult in Clitheroe, in which I was to have lost my life. You are betrayed. Salvatore will be indicted with you for this conspiracy without delay. Your hired ruffians will be witnesses against you. I give you timely warning, not for your own sake, but out of respect for the memory of your son.

‘MARGARET.’

With the earliest light, Roger Hindle despatched a messenger with this letter to Mytton Hall. Close on the heels of this threatening message came the frightful news that Salvatore's corpse had been found floating in the Hodder. Horror and apprehension overcame for a while even the resolution of the Countess. She did not await the summons to answer the charge with which she was threatened, but fled, and spent some years abroad.

Margaret felt that a new era of existence had commenced. She had grappled with her enemy, and driven her away torn and bleeding. In her state of exaltation she was possessed by a feline rage. She lay down in her solitude, like a tigress, terrible, after a conflict in which she has defended her cubs from the hunter. Persecution and misfortune had aroused in her passions of which she had never before been conscious ; she was alarmed alike at their character and their force. She strove in solitude to nurse gentler sentiments ; she would *not* seek revenge by the misfortunes of the Noels ; but she was, at least, free to protect, not herself merely, but others, from becoming their victims.

Gradually she conquered the passionate fever of deadly conflict with her enemy. Still, though she determined to devote her life, not to revenge, but to resistance to the fatal influence of the Countess on the family of her late husband, she remained under the influence of an exaltation which gave to all she did a character foreign to her true nature. The property which she had inherited from her father, together with that arising from the sale of her jewels, afforded her an income far beyond her wants. She could not in her cottage spend a fourth of that revenue: she devoted the rest to the perfection of an agency by which she could watch and thwart the Countess. She resolved to keep her in exile by the dread of judicial proceedings in England. She would alarm her conscience, if she had any, and thus endeavour to prevent new machinations in the arrangements of her family by which her evil influence might prevail. Margaret had friends in Italy, who selected for her suitable agents. Wherever the Countess was—on her patrimonial estate in Corsica—among her kinsfolk at Paris or Naples—she was made conscious, by an occasional letter, that all she did was known to Margaret.

For example, this letter was received by the Countess in her villa at Portici :—

‘COUNTESS,—It is vain for you to suppose that even your most private correspondence escapes the eye of her whom you proclaimed to be the Witch of Pendle. Your son Herbert, the Lord De la Legh who succeeded him whose death you have to account for, loves Lord Wentworth too much to make him, as you made your own son, the victim of family ambition. He is still a boy at Eton, a boy of generous impulses. Beware! he shall be told, as soon as he is old enough to comprehend it, all the history of Margaret. He will then learn to dread and hate his perfidious grandmother, and to thwart her plots of pride. .

‘MARGARET.’

Here is a later letter, received in Paris :—

‘COUNTESS,—All about you hate you. Everyone betrays you. You are surrounded by spies paid to do you obsequious homage, but to watch you even when you sleep—to read your correspondence, to record your most casual words. All you do—all you say—is known to me. You

have disobeyed and defied me. You have written to your son Herbert, urging him to contract a marriage for Lord Wentworth with the Countess Arden, and that without consulting him. Do you think that Lord Wentworth, a man of genius and force of character, will submit to such dictation? He has a copy of your letter ere this. He knows what his grandmother thinks of him—viz: that she is at liberty to dispose of him like a serf. Lord Wentworth will rebel.

‘MARGARET.’

Then, a year after, another :—

‘COUNTESS,—You are working the ruin of your husband’s family. We English do not submit to Corsicans. You have persisted in your intention to marry Lord Wentworth to the Countess Arden. You have met your equal in resolution. He is not your gentle son, my husband, Rufus; nor the son whom you have possessed—his successor, Herbert; but he is a Saxon. He has less of your venomous blood in his veins. He will not marry your Countess Arden.

‘MARGARET.’



But a year later came the following :—

‘COUNTESS,—Reckon the deaths which your fatal ambition has caused. Your son Rufus, my husband; your confessor, Salvatore, the accomplice of the crimes for which English justice will one day punish you. Add to them another! Lucy Girdlestone, the affianced bride of your grandson Lord Wentworth. Prepare yourself for others. This last crime will have its consequences. When the catalogue is completed my husband will, in some dread hour of night, stand beside your couch, and call you to your account.

‘MARGARET.’

During the years over which this correspondence extends, Margaret, from time to time, making Roger Hindle partially her confidant, disappeared from her little fortress of the Owlets’ Hole. Sometimes she was absent for many months. Her letters, always addressed under cover to Roger Hindle, were sent to an agent in London, and thence forwarded to her. Nothing more was known of her whereabouts. This only transpired, that a female attendant, looking like the sister of some foreign Pro-

testant order—like the nurse of a hospital, or the teacher of a dame's school—travelled with her to Clitheroe, and then disappeared. Margaret returned calmer from each such absence, and seemed, in some system of pious self-discipline and charity, to regain a more quiet mind.

As soon as Margaret, by what she witnessed in the Harwood Fair, was aware of the strong impression made on Rufus Noel by the beauty of Alice Hindle, she put herself in communication with Robert Hindle. She disclosed to him all the grounds of her apprehension of danger to Alice if any intercourse between her and Rufus Noel occurred. She aroused the vigilance of Robert. After the unexpected encounter between Rufus and Robert in Mytton, she urged the most watchful guardianship of his cousin, and offered her aid. We have seen what followed. She had three several resources. First, Robert's vigilance, and the constant impediments interposed between Rufus and Alice by his agency. Then her own personal interference with Rufus. The interference of advice, remonstrance, warning, even

of threats, and lastly of the awakened rage of his rival. Then she also reflected on the influence of an interview with Alice. That she reserved till other expedients had failed. She had much reliance on the serene elevation of Alice's character. She schooled herself to appreciate the whole bearing of this towards her own father, Mr. Hindle, towards her local duties, and towards her sense of religious responsibility. By conversations with Robert and with Roger Hindle, she gradually grasped the state of Alice's mind.

She found that she made no impression whatever on the self-reliant mind of Rufus. His courage and will quailed before no obstacle. Delay itself he regarded as a claim on his patience and power of endurance, not as a gulf in which to exhaust the force of his resolution. By singleness of aim, by constancy of purpose, by making all other things subservient to his passion, he felt assured of ultimate success. He therefore was silent when Margaret entreated, remonstrated, and warned; and when she threatened he smiled. An almost fatal smile, for it awoke in Margaret's heart the half-stifled rage! Did he defy her?

## CHAPTER IX.

ALICE was sitting alone in the drawing-room of her uncle Maskeleyne's house a little before noon. He had been unexpectedly taken away, by Mr. Leycester's keeper Daniel, in high spirits, to Browsholme, and, in the exuberance of his joy he had shown his niece a letter from Mr. Leycester. This letter briefly told Mr. Maskeleyne that his patron was glad to assure him that the questions of dilapidations of the Parsonage, and of the restoration of the chancel of the church, were likely to be most agreeably settled by a mutual friend who had undertaken to expend a thousand pounds on these objects. Mr. Maskeleyne was, therefore, invited to bring the plans of the Parsonage and chancel to Browsholme, to receive Mr. Leycester's proposals in detail.

He had been gone an hour when the servant brought in a letter which had been left by a

gentleman on foot, who did not ask to be admitted, but who also left his card. She read on the card 'Mr. Rufus Noel, Mytton Hall.'

She broke the seal of the letter, not without some little agitation, and read as follows:—

'DEAR MISS HINDLE,—I have reflected upon your conditions. At first they seemed to interpose insuperable difficulties to that which has become the object of my life. But, after reflection, I do not despair. I am to win my father's consent before you will even admit me as your suitor. Years of arduous exertion for him may be required to entitle me to ask this with any hope of success. I devote myself to this task. In the meantime, how shall I prove to you, through years of absence and struggle, that I am true to one thought—the prize of all my efforts. From time to time you will receive, in a way which will not embarrass you, some proof of this constancy. When I have gained my own father's consent, I will present myself to yours, and plead my claims to be allowed to prefer my suit to you.

'These are your conditions, as I understand them.

‘Meanwhile you are free. I assume this task. You do not impose it. You only say that I am not qualified to be your suitor. I go to win the requisite qualifications—the consent of my father and of yours. Farewell!—RUFUS NOEL.’

She was disturbed. Mr. Rufus Noel had written a letter to which she could make no reply. It left her unfettered. When he became her suitor, she was free to reject his addresses. It expressly said that she had not imposed any task upon him. Yet she was distressed that for years he should be toiling to win a preliminary assent to be allowed to seek her. While she pondered, the servant-maid announced that a lady wished to be admitted, but the girl could give no intelligible name. Alice allowed her visitor to be brought in, and at once recognised the lady who had succoured her in the tumult and confusion in Harwood Fair.

Alice advanced to welcome and to thank her, which she did with much earnestness.

‘Ah!’ said the lady, ‘you were unconscious half the time, Miss Hindle, in that affray. Your alarm for your absent scholar and friend, a natural apprehension of the fury of the

faction fight, some emotion scarcely known to yourself, all so strained your nerves, that you were half fainting.'

'I was certainly only partially conscious,' said Alice.

'Else you would have heard me warn Mr. Rufus Noel, who rescued you with such skill and promptitude, not to allow your beauty and the strange incidents of the day to get a hold on his imagination.'

'I have some indistinct idea of such a warning; but it seems a dream.'

'I was myself the victim of a similar passion in his uncle, but his uncle's love for me cost him his life, and was my ruin.'

'Are you not the lady who lives at the Owlets' Hole, near Pendleton Hall?'

'I am, and I have written out my history in this little book, in order that you may read and be warned by it. I was the victim of the perfidy of Lady De la Legh, the mother of my husband. And here is another history of another lady, the sister of the Vicar of Whalley, Lucy Girdlestone. She died of a broken heart. We were both sacrificed to the pride and ambition of the Noels.'

‘I will read both,’ said Alice.

‘Now I know that within an hour Rufus Noel has delivered at this house a letter for you, in which he engages, through years, to toil to win his father’s consent, that he may become a suitor for your hand in marriage.’

‘That is so,’ said Alice ; ‘ here is the letter, which I have just read.’

‘Do not let the thought creep into your mind,’ said Margaret. ‘It will be fatal to your peace. This is a young man of rare power, will, and purpose. His name will be heard of all over Europe. Suffer not yourself to believe that when he is becoming famous he is seeking to win you. These deeds are natural acts of a gifted race, full of the ambition of fame ; but no maiden who loves the sanctity of her own thoughts can indulge the dream that an absent man, above her own rank, is striving, in danger, to win her love. Banish the illusion as you would a temptation of the Evil One !’

‘I have felt distressed at this anticipation,’ said Alice.

‘He himself,’ continued the lady, ‘knows not what is in store for him. He inherits much of the fortune, and his father inherits all the



projects, of his late uncle, Lord De la Legh. Among them was the marriage of the lover of Lucy Girdlestone to the Countess Arden, the daughter of Lord Castlemaine. Here is the proof that this project is revived with respect to Rufus Noel. This letter, copied by my agent, is on its way to Lord Castlemaine, from the Dowager Countess De la Legh, the grandmother of Rufus Noel.'

Alice took from her hands a letter, and read as follows :—

'DEAR LORD CASTLEMAINE,—Though Herbert's wishes as to Lord Wentworth's marriage were foiled by his son's eccentric conduct, do not interpose to prevent a revival of the scheme of alliance between our families, if Hubert's son Rufus should take a fancy to Lady Arden. He is a lad of genius, and under your guidance would become a distinguished statesman. He is said to be the very image of what Wentworth was when we used to indulge the hope that Lady Arden was not indifferent to him. If you enter into this design, afford facilities. Let the young people see a good deal of each other. Thus, without our intervention, which spoiled

our plans for Wentworth, we may hope to revive them for his cousin, Rufus Noel. You tell me that neither your English law nor your police have any cure for Evil Eyes. I should have thought that you, who control the destinies of Europe, would have had power to despatch a crazy woman to Botany Bay.—Yours ever,

‘S. M. DE LA LEGH.’

When Alice raised her eyes from the perusal of this letter the lady continued :

‘Lucy Girdlestone, whom Lord Wentworth sought to marry, is in her grave. Rufus Noel is, you see, destined by these plotters to marry this Countess Arden. He knows nothing of the plot. You are forewarned. He will be entangled in a mesh of political schemes and of plans of family aggrandisement. This Countess Arden, who has estates in her own right worth £20,000 a year, will be placed in his path. What chance is there, do you think, Alice Hindle, that he will remember, in his ambitious struggles, a simple maiden of low degree, whom he rescued in great danger, and of whose beauty and purity he was romantically enamoured for awhile?’

‘You warn me that, even if his present love

were any other thing than a romantic fancy, it will be tried by severe tests.'

'I warn you further, that if you indulge this dream, when you are doting on the thought of a devoted lover looking to win your favour, I shall have my eye on a selfish man of the world battling for place, power, and distinction, and regarding marriage only as a means to an end—success in life.'

'I am warned. I never saw Mr. Rufus Noel but twice. On the first occasion, he saved my life; on the second, he professed that he had formed a wish to make me his wife! I know too little of him to be weaned from my father—from the simple duties of my station—by any thought of him. But I acknowledge the danger of allowing my fancy to brood, in my seclusion, on the idea which his letter suggests.'

'Then give me the letter. Write upon it: "Returned by Margaret; who, with the consent of Lady De la Legh, supposed she had married Rufus Viscount Wentworth, but was the victim of his mother."'

'Will you deliver the letter?'

'This very day. I have a sure messenger at hand—your own cousin, Robert Hindle.'

‘You are right,’ said Alice; ‘I cannot permit Mr. Rufus Noel to think I await the fulfilment of his trial and the success of his efforts. I write on the letter what you suggest.’

‘Your cousin is in the garden,’ said Margaret, ‘and he shall be my messenger. I will only add these words: “Entrusted by Margaret to Robert Hindle, the guardian of Miss Alice Hindle, to be delivered to Mr. Rufus Noel.”’

She left the room, and returned in a few minutes.

‘You have saved yourself from a great peril. You have crushed the egg of this serpent in your thoughts. It cannot now be warmed into life, and sting you before you are aware.’

‘I return to my father to-morrow,’ said Alice. ‘I am impatient to do so, for what has happened here could not have occurred at Harwood Cliff without his knowledge.’

‘Break it only very gradually to him,’ said Margaret. ‘Your cousin tells me that he must be spared all agitation of mind. But your cousin Robert, who must be absent from home some time, entrusts the Vicar of Whalley with a deputed guardianship in his absence.’

‘My father must decide,’ said Alice, meekly. ‘I have too little experience of life beyond my household duties and the interests of our limited neighbourhood.’

‘I have spent much time at Paris with the Protestant deaconesses. I have worked with them. You are a kind of deaconess, Alice, to your old minister. Let me work with you. It will keep me, as my work in Paris has kept me, from unchristian thoughts. Without the society of these ladies devoted to charity, I should have become a tigress.’

‘You know Mr. Roger Hindle. He will introduce you to my father and to our minister. They have wisdom and experience of life. I have only the light which the revealed Word and my own conscience shed on the narrow path in which I strive to walk. My destiny is in the hands of God, and, under Him, of my father.’

‘I will make myself known to your guardian, the Vicar. He does not know that I was the deaconess who nursed his sister, Lucy Girdlestone, in her long illness. I watched her. I strove to assure her of Lord Wentworth’s constancy; that he would wait till all obstacles were removed. The fatal blow had been struck

before I came. I could only cheer her decline by making her believe in the truth of Lord Wentworth. Her father and her brother gave her spiritual consolation which my withered heart and languid faith could not afford.'

'Why do you come to me?' said Alice.

'To appeal to your religious sense of duty—to your maidenly dignity and purity—to warn you, by my own fate and that of Lucy Girdlestone, of the terrible risk to which you are exposed.'

'At all events,' said Alice, 'you and my cousin Robert, who is always manly and true, have the same conviction of danger. I thank you heartily. I might have allowed this dream to occupy my thoughts. With God's help, it shall not. I see the precipice on which I stood. I have withdrawn before I am dizzy.'

Alice rose, and Margaret, feeling that she had made a prolonged demand on her attention, and exposed her emotions to some strain, withdrew.

When she had gone, the self-possession which Alice had displayed throughout the conversation gave way. She had answered the appeals to her conscience and sense of filial and reli-

gious duty simply and at once. She felt the necessity of shutting from her thoughts the idea that a young man of high personal endowments, and of rank and wealth much beyond her own, was devoting his life generously to fulfil conditions which would satisfy her that she could admit him as a lover. She had obeyed—as she always obeyed—the dictates of a pure conscience, a maiden's delicacy, a daughter's love. She had returned the letter. She had even at once seen that to write upon it what Margaret had suggested was the best way to show to Rufus Noel that she was aware of all the obstacles which the difference of their station and probable destiny which the pride and ambition of his grandmother, and her influence over his father, interposed to the accomplishment of Rufus's wishes. She felt that, as she ought not to brood upon the thought of his love, so she ought at once to make him aware of her resolution to expel this thought, if possible, from her mind. Therefore, with the quick intuition of her sex, she had at once yielded to Margaret's suggestions, as though from mere simplicity and inexperience, but really from an instinctive perception of duty.

But when Margaret was gone there came the collapse. Was she really so indifferent to Rufus Noel as she had seemed to be when she spoke so calmly? She was bound to dismiss his suit. Was it quite certain that he would accept this repulse? Would not some proof reach her ere long that, notwithstanding this rejection, he persevered? That he was, though absent, climbing the hill of difficulty, and when he had surmounted it, would present himself to implore her to be convinced that she had the happiness of his life in her power? If such proofs came from time to time, what was she to do? Could she then entirely shut out the thought against the fatal influence of which she had been warned? Would it by degrees obtain the mastery over her spirit? Would this human love present itself with such proofs of depth and tried constancy as at length to assert its triumph? If she could ponder over all this now, how was it possible to fulfil her purpose to shut out from her reveries the thought of Rufus Noel? Oh! that her mother had been alive!

Then she thought with alarm on some other incidents of the interview. Whenever Margaret spoke of the Dowager Countess De la Legh,



there was a strange wild glare in her eyes. She had said, too, that she had sought, in the work of a sister of charity, to stifle the spirit of revenge for her own wrongs. What did this glare mean, then? Did the rage of vengeance still lurk like insanity in Margaret's brain?

She thought, too, with anxiety, on Margaret's intercourse with her cousin Robert. He had thrice fruitlessly sought her love. He had now become her guardian. In accepting that trust she knew that Robert had relinquished all idea of making her his wife. But if Margaret had inspired him with repugnance to Rufus Noel—if she had taught him that a fate like Margaret's own, or like that of Lucy Girdlestone, awaited his cousin Alice, the idol of his own heart, if she yielded to the suit of a Noel—what was not the stubborn Robert capable of to protect her from a positive danger? Surely she had committed a grave error in permitting the letter to be conveyed to Rufus Noel by him! They would meet in ill-concealed rivalry, perhaps in hate. There would be a collision, perhaps an outburst of pent-up pas-

sion. O, luckless maiden, to be the source of such calamities ! Her hands were clasped. She was pale. Her eyes were uplifted. ‘ Save them, O Father ! ’ she said, ‘ from the terrible issues of human wrath, without the perdition of crime. “ Love,” says the wise king, “ is strong as death : jealousy is cruel as the grave.” ’

There was need for such a prayer. Robert Hindle had been stung to madness during the last few days. Soon after the indignity which he had put on Rufus Noel, came a letter from Lord Salmesbury to Abraham Whitaker, to inform him that Mr. Horrocks had transferred his interest in the game of the Manor to Mr. Rufus Noel, of Mytton Hall, and that he had appointed Daniel Shaw, the keeper of Browsholme, to watch the game, with the help of Abraham’s three sons. Lord Salmesbury also expressed his hope that Abraham’s sons would at once comply with this arrangement, as he was sure that they would find Mr. Rufus Noel a generous master.

Abraham could not refuse to follow the wishes of his landlord. In the course of the day, Daniel Shaw appeared with a similar letter

from Lord Salmesbury to Mr. Leycester, and an order from Mr. Rufus Noel to engage the services of the three young giants at an advance of wages. There was a cunning twinkle in Daniel's eye which neither the father nor the sons could interpret.

Daniel smoked a pipe with them. When he had done, he said, as though upon a casual reminiscence, that the '*game letting*' included Lord Salmesbury's chamber in the farmhouse, and, without further preface, before either the shrewd father or the simple-minded sons could interfere, he was half-way up the stairs to the room which was still occupied by Robert Hindle. There, at a glance, he saw abundant proofs of its present occupation. He found a portfolio and writing materials on the table, an open book with Robert Hindle's name in it ; on the sofa a maud and a large necktie. This last he stuffed into the pocket of his shooting-jacket. Before the father could reach the room in breathless haste, he had made this survey and effected this capture. Daniel then directed the room to be repainted, papered, to have a new carpet, a fresh cover for the table, clean window-blinds, and requested Abraham to arrange all

these things, giving him no hint whatever as to the result of his observations.

It was well that Robert Hindle was absent, as he might have resented Daniel's sudden intrusion.

When he returned, he saw at once that he was despoiled of his lurking-place, but he did not return till after nightfall. He determined to leave his post of observation before daylight. The farmer promised not to open the door to any demand in the night. But in the middle of the night the deep tones of the Browsholme bloodhound were heard all round the house. Robert listened: he heard a shrill whistle directing the quest of the dog. About three o'clock it was withdrawn. At four he saddled his own horse in the stable, and, without awakening the Whitakers, rode to the inn on the south side of the bridge over the Ribble at Ribchester. There he ensconced himself again in the calfshed at Salmesbury Hall, and with his telescope searched the landscape through the furze twisted in the hurdle. He gained nothing by his observations, though continued from day to day. At night he rode to a rendezvous, where he had an interview near Browsholme with Mar-

garet. Thus Rufus was watched by Margaret in Browsholme Hall, and the result of her vigilance was known to her confederate.

Mr. Maskeleyne was to be conciliated by the restoration of his Parsonage and chancel by an unknown patron.

Rufus would himself deliver a letter to Alice, accepting her reply as the basis of his future efforts to win her hand in marriage.

If Robert appeared anywhere on the Manor, Daniel Shaw had sworn that the Browsholme bloodhound would know his trail and would follow him.

All their efforts to protect Alice by their own vigilance, therefore, were vain. Nothing seemed to shake the will of Rufus Noel. Obstacles only exalted his resolution ; danger he met by daring. He even refined and elevated his own idea of the way in which Alice's consent was to be won. Since she would not stoop even to admit the first approach of a clandestine lover, he would win, at whatever cost of time and effort, the right to approach her loyally. Yet so deep in Robert's mind was the dread for Alice of the growth in her thoughts of a love destined, as he conceived, to suffer

wreck on the shoals of the pride and ambition of Rufus's family, that he seconded Margaret's idea of a personal appeal to Alice's sense of filial and religious duty. He braced up, also, his own spirit for a final remonstrance with Rufus Noel himself. If this failed, he could scarcely trust the volcano of passion that he knew to be boiling under the crust of his cold and hard exterior.

When, therefore, he received the letter endorsed by Alice and Margaret, to be returned by him on their behalf to Rufus, he sprang on to his horse, and galloped with breathless haste along the north bank of the Ribble, through Bailey, to a farmhouse opposite the Bendwood Cliff. Leaving his horse there, he waded the Ribble on a shoal, and climbed through the western slope of the woods to the summit of the hill. He had watched Rufus take this road on foot. He knew he could certainly meet him here on the narrow path through the wood. He sat down behind a thicket of hollies to recover from the breathless haste of his ride, and to reflect on this his final interview with Rufus Noel.

His arrangements for going to Australia were

proceeding steadily. This, the last service he could render to Alice for years, therefore demanded all his skill and care. Much depended on his self-command—on his power to assent to the right motives in a chivalrous man of high intellect, whose courage was ready for any trial in pursuit of his settled purposes. Robert felt himself unequal to the contest, either in ability or in the singular self-possession and coolness which Rufus exhibited in all crises of trial. He feared that the fury which he felt to be boiling in his blood would break forth. For Alice's sake, he endeavoured to master it. Yet he had a difficult task. He knew not how to accomplish it without some uncontrollable outburst of the fury of his own personal antagonism to Rufus Noel.

He had more than half-an-hour in which to think of the safest mode of action. At length he saw Rufus climbing the slopes through the wood. He rose, and when Rufus had reached the summit of the hill he advanced towards him. They met.

‘Mr. Noel,’ he said, ‘you may not be aware that I am one of the guardians of Miss Alice Hindle, after the death of her father. In that

capacity I have been requested by her to return to you a letter which you left this morning at the Parsonage at Ribchester.'

'How am I to know, sir,' said Rufus, fiercely, 'that you have not usurped that office, as you usurped that of being head-keeper of Lord Salmesbury's Manor?'

'Simply,' replied Robert, 'by reading what Miss Hindle has written on the back of your letter, and what further the lady to whom she confided your letter has added.'

Rufus read the two endorsements on his letter.

'I see from this,' he said, more calmly, 'that you have been in communication with this unfortunate lady. I can only meet her plots with silence. She has been much wronged. I pardon her all her mistrust. But I am not accustomed to have my path dogged and watched. Answer me a simple question. Have you not been yourself a suitor to Miss Alice Hindle?'

'I have,' said Robert, frankly.

'Has she not rejected your proposals?' continued Rufus.

'She has, though they have been thrice renewed?' replied Robert.



‘Have you deceived yourself with the thought that the outrage which your simple agents perpetrated upon me a few days ago was not the explosion of your rage as a disappointed rival?’

‘I am ready to answer to you now or at any other time Mr. Noel for my interference with your clandestine addresses to my future ward. I acted then, as now, as her guardian, without any hope whatever of her love.’

‘I do not wish to call you to account. I have schooled myself to suffer even this from you. I cross your path. I inflame your passions. But I need all my own self-possession to win your cousin’s love. And be assured, though you were backed by all the fiends, you cannot deter me. I will win it.’

‘But will not your own conscience, Mr. Noel, deter you? You cannot forget how fatal the love of your race has been to maidens of lower degree. You know the history of Margaret Forester, and of Lucy Girdlestone, both sacrificed by your family. Do you not see that I must protect my future ward from such a danger—that she dare not think of you?’

‘Granted, if you will. Use your utmost influence to make Alice forget me. Strive to win her yourself. We have met. She knows my determination. That never falters or changes. She shall have proofs of this. Whether you will or not, I will, with my father’s full consent, make her my wife, if she will consent.’

‘Then, though she has rejected your suit, you will not desist?’

‘Not even had I been thrice rejected would I withdraw from the pursuit of one who has no equal in beauty and worth.’

At this allusion to his own rejected addresses Robert’s rage became almost ungovernable; but, restraining himself by a strong effort, he replied :

‘Then you must prepare yourself for the only alternative which remains to me—an immediate disclosure to Sir Hubert Noel of all that I know—and I know all—of your recent clandestine suit to Miss Alice Hindle.’

‘Take care, sir. My patience has its limits. If you do not withdraw that threat at once, I will put it out of your power to repeat it.’

‘I not only do not withdraw it,’ said Robert, ‘but as I am determined to stop you

at once in the mad career in which you would make my ward's happiness, if not her life, the sport of your passions, I will lose no time in seeking Sir Hubert Noel, and giving him the proof of your conduct during the last month.'

'Then be on your guard and defend yourself,' said Rufus, coolly, 'for you have made me a desperate man. I have no weapons; but be on your guard.'

Robert saw a total change in Rufus's features. It was not rage. A deadly resolution was expressed in his eyes, his pale cheeks, and his compressed lips. He spoke again:—

'Before I grapple with you, tell me that, as a man who himself acknowledges the influence of this lady's beauty and character, you are incapable of betraying to my father the pure and virtuous passion which I have for her, especially when you know that I shall not prefer my suit until I have won his consent.'

Robert's passion was too much inflamed for any concession, though he felt the force of this appeal.

'It is too late,' he replied. 'I throw away my hunting-knife. I have now no weapon. I will struggle for my life as I best may.'

‘Then say your last prayer,’ said Rufus.

He rushed upon his antagonist, and seized him by the throat with a grasp so like that of the talon of a vulture that Robert staggered back incapable of breath, and fell with his enemy upon him.

A few minutes would have sufficed to burden Rufus Noel’s conscience with the guilt of blood, if not to make him amenable to his country’s laws, if the very violence of the onslaught itself had not, at the moment that it threw Robert Hindle rudely on his back, given him opportunity to raise his foot to Rufus Noel’s chest. With the energy of despair he strained against his enemy’s grip, thrusting him with his whole force, though he seemed to tear his throat with claws, till the muscular force and resolution of Robert broke the hold of Rufus on his neck.

Both sprang to their feet. Robert, breathless, evaded another rush from Rufus, and sought to recover his strength by retreating in a circle from his fierce enemy.

Rufus failed to close again on his prey. Robert gradually regained his breath. He stopped suddenly and said :

‘Mr. Noel, you were right. I feel that I am acting more as a rival than as a guardian, though I did not know it. Give me time for reflection. I am not a man to quail before danger, but I distrust my own judgment when my passions are raging as they are now. I make this concession : I will not speak to Sir Hubert, or make any communication to him unless my calmer reason make it appear to me to be my duty. In that case, I will tell you, and if you demand it, you shall have an opportunity to meet me with any weapon you may choose, before I write to your father.’

‘But supposing I take your life in our duel. Will you leave no writing : will you leave no message to my father?’

‘That I cannot promise without reflection.’

‘Then be on your guard again,’ said Rufus.

They were near the summit of the Bendwood. A few paces from where they stood was a very steep but grassy slope, at an angle of nearly sixty degrees to the edge of the cliff. When they renewed their combat the circles in which Robert still retreated from his enemy approached, unknown to both of them, nearer and

nearer to the verge of this slope. Robert was watching his opportunity to close on Rufus. He had made one or two efforts, and had been met by a stunning blow between the eyes. He was retreating unconscious of the perilous nature of the ground, when, seeing his opportunity, he rushed in, striking Rufus a heavy blow, and at the next moment, placing his leg between his antagonist's, and delivering another hit in the face, he overthrew Rufus on his back, with his head and shoulders over the edge of the declivity.

Instantly the prostrate foe was beyond Robert's grasp, and unable to make any effort slid with terrific rapidity down the declivity to the edge of the cliff, over which he made a summersault, and fell flat on his face on the smooth and deep pool at the foot of the precipice, sinking instantly in the water.

Here he would have been drowned before Robert Hindle could reach the pool had not Rufus's foster-brother, his keeper and attendant in all his sports, been by appointment waiting for his master at the foot of the cliff, to return with him to Mytton Hall. He plunged at once into the pool, dived for the body, brought it to

the bank apparently lifeless, but soon to give some signs of returning animation.

All this Robert Hindle witnessed with breathless anxiety from the wood. He kept aloof. He would not betray Rufus's secret. By-and-by, he went home, to await the consequences of this encounter with his rival.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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